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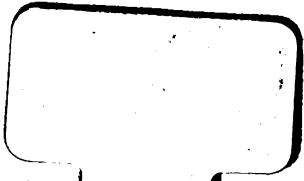
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# **SORROW ON THE SEA.**

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**VOL. I.**



# SORROW ON THE SEA.

A Novel.

BY

LADY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF "SABINA," ETC.

"There is sorrow on the sea."—JER. xliv. 23.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1868.

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LONDON:  
SAVILL, EDWARDS AND CO., PRINTERS, CHANDOS STREET,  
COVENT GARDEN.

# SORROW ON THE SEA.

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## CHAPTER I.

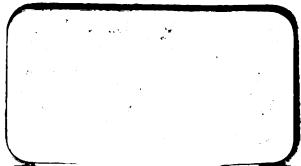
There is a widow dwelling on the Green,  
A dainty dame, who can but barely live  
On her poor pittance.

CRABBE.

THE evening was dreary, the season was pitiless, and the fortunes of the small family, assembled in the gloom of a November twilight round a handful of fire, were in a state of depression which accorded with the wintry weather. A widow, in the primmest of widows' caps, and an invalid daughter of twenty-four years, made the most of such warmth as the meagre amount of fuel afforded. A blooming girl of seventeen sat a little back from the other two, with traces of tears on her cheeks. She was in disgrace with her mother for an involuntary fault—that of



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# **SORROW ON THE SEA.**

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**VOL. I.**

with the anger of Achilles, and wept at the parting of Hector and Andromache.

“Where poverty is felt the thought is chained,  
And sweet colloquial pleasures are but few.”

Perhaps it was to take her girls into a new world of thought that the widow read aloud every evening ; and when she grew weary, Margaret and Cora took the volume to continue the task. Their choice of books was, like their income, limited.

The widow was the relict of an officer in the army, who was returning home severely wounded from the Peninsula, when the packet on board which he had taken his passage was attacked by a French privateer.

Captain Noble insisted on going on deck, and distinguished himself in repelling the French sailors in their attempts to board the packet. When at length the enemy was compelled to sheer off with heavy loss, the gallant captain had found a certain cure for his wounds and every other ailment without the benefit of his native air.

Mrs. Noble had ordered a post-chaise to go to West Cliffs to meet her husband. Margaret was to remain at home, because the eighteen miles

journey might make her worse; but Cora was to have on her best cotton dress and Sunday bonnet, to accompany her mother. Old Betty, in the plenitude of her excitement, scrubbed the kitchen floor twice over, and arranged the plates on the dresser in three different ways, before she was satisfied that "master" would like them best so.

The post-chaise was to be at the door at eleven o'clock, but at ten two ladies came to call on Mrs. Noble.

"I am very glad to see you, I am sure," she said, in a voice that trembled with happy agitation; "but I cannot remain with you long—just an hour only. You see, I am going to West Cliffs to meet Hal. He is getting so much better; his native air will quite set him up, they say. But why do you look at me *so*? Good heavens! why are you that colour? You can't *know* anything. No, no! I *know* you can't have heard since I have! Ah!" said the unhappy woman, her voice going off into a scream as she flung herself on the floor, and clasped the knees of one of the ladies. "For the love of Christ, speak! Is he alive?"

She was answered by their silence and their tears.

Her daughters tended her with dutious care. Old Betty ran about and did double her amount of work, wiping her streaming eyes with the corner of her apron.

Aftor the violence of the shock which had made Reason reel on her throne, Mrs. Noble lay for days in a dreary vacuity of thought and feeling. They thought it best so, and left her alone.

One day some men brought the large trunk which contained all that the husband and father had had to leave to his wife and children ; his watch, two or three books, and his clothes—a few shirts and stockings, and his tarnished uniform, stained, alas ! with his life-blood. The great trunk had been deposited by the men in the centre of the small kitchen of Mrs. Noble's cottage. It was necessary that it should be moved, and for that reason the two girls had unpacked it to save their mother the pain and the shock of seeing articles fraught with remembrances at the same time so tender and so terrible.

Weeping, the two girls took from the box the various trifles they remembered so well. There was the little flat pincushion worn in their father's waistcoat pocket, which Cora had made for him in her childhood ; the locket taken from his dead breast, when the heart that never harboured an unworthy feeling had ceased to throb ; the miniature of his wife, done by himself with much care and pains, but with a result hardly satisfactory to his admiration of her beauty ; the Geneva watch which had been purchased at the end of months of economy, and had been prized above its value consequently—this had stopped at the instant of his being struck by the bullet which had deprived him of life, but in the movement made by Margaret taking it from the trunk—where it had been placed, wrapped in his sash—it went on again ; and from the idea it gave of recent life in its late possessor, the girls listened to it awe-stricken. Cora had the watch applied to her ear, when she saw, on looking up, her mother's tall figure and haggard face gazing on her. She had arisen from her bed with some uneasy suspicion in her mind regarding her deceased husband, and came

on the girls, who looked up at her with terror and apprehension.

"Go back to bed, my mother," said Margaret ; "we will bring all the articles, and place them by your side. You *must* go," she added taking her arm with gentle violence ; "and look ! There is my father's old leather writing-case, the blotting paper very likely with words left reversed on it. Perhaps bits of letters to us."

The widow took the book, and returned to her bed, but before she could examine its contents, she was shivering in the convulsive violence of incipient fever, and it was many weeks before she could weep over the records of love and tenderness found in that shabby leather case.

"Lisbon Packet, July 18—

"**MY OWN NELLIE**,—It is but an half an hour since I finished a letter to you, and sent it by the 'Lively Sally,' a packet which is a better sailer than the one I have the luck to be on board. In a few days I shall be able. (God willing) to hold you and my girls in my arms once more. Thoughts of home crowd on my mind, a home of love which no poverty can allay,

for our poverty has in it no taint of dishonour.  
My Nellie ! my friend of twenty-five summers,  
I laugh when I hear of men's inconstancy, feel-  
ing how true in thought, word, and deed, I have  
ever been to you, queen of my heart.

“ As I write a feeling of depression adds to my  
tenderness towards you and my girls : a silly song  
by Lord Lyttelton, rings in my ears—

To meet thy smile, my Mary,  
I seek my native shore;  
It comes into my fancy  
I ne'er shall see thee more.

This is foolish, for my wounded leg is getting  
well, and my health is much improved ; but in  
life or death I shall ever be filled with love for  
you. They say a French privateer is bearing  
down upon us ; all hands are piped on deck.  
Farewell, my Nellie.”

Mrs. Noble had married at seventeen, and was  
forty-two at the period of her great loss. When  
she slowly recovered from her deathlike illness,  
she found that she could best show her devotion  
to the memory of her departed husband by acting  
according to his wishes.

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## SORROW ON THE SEA.

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### CHAPTER I.

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CRABBE.

THE evening was dreary, the season was pitiless, and the fortunes of the small family, assembled in the gloom of a November twilight round a handful of fire, were in a state of depression which accorded with the wintry weather. A widow, in the primmest of widows' caps, and an invalid daughter of twenty-four years, made the most of such warmth as the meagre amount of fuel afforded. A blooming girl of seventeen sat a little back from the other two, with traces of tears on her cheeks. She was in disgrace with her mother for an involuntary fault—that of

grand in his powdered head and pigtail on Sundays in his large pew, he was kind at heart ; and soon after Captain Noble's death he called at the cottage and found that Mrs. Noble was unconscious of anything but a vague sense of distress.

He asked to see Margaret, and pressed upon her twenty pounds as a loan.

Margaret, who knew that a guinea and a few shillings were all the contents of her mother's pocket, and that there were candles for the night-watching to be bought, and the prescriptions to be made up at the chemist's (for the physician would never take a fee from Mrs. Noble, having been a friend of her husband's), and the small wants of the household to be supplied, accepted the loan gratefully.

When Mrs. Noble recovered, she was told of Tom Bowles' kindness, and her sallow face flushed to a clear scarlet on the cheeks—two scarlet spots, which left the rest of her countenance with its usual olive tint.

She said nothing, but her resolution was taken ; and bitter were the inflictions of privation under which the family suffered, till at the end of seven months she wrote a small note in the

smallest of Italian hands, and requested Mr. Thomas Bowles to come and take tea with her.

On these occasions Betty baked a small loaf, and a quarter of a pound of fresh butter was purchased; some Cornish cream and some good tea without sugar completed the preparations for a guest, which were conducted with the same degree of gravity and importance as inspires the breast of the grandest *chef de cuisine* in the London season.

Mr. Thomas Bowles accepted the invitation, as he accepted every invitation from the widow; the truth being, that having a mind that aspired to cultivation, he found in the eldest daughter a degree of intellect the attrition of which ever brightened his own. "I find no man in Trevedra who can compare with her in sense or in reading," he always used to say when asked whether Miss Noble was not very "odd," "very eccentric"—whether they were not "a strange family." "Very," he would say, drily; "they are handsome without seeking to be admired, and poor without being in debt."

When the tea-tray had been removed, Mrs.

Noble, with a bright flush again on her cheeks, said,—

“Mr. Bowles, you were kind enough to lend us some money in our distress. I am very grateful for the accommodation; and now I repay it with thanks. I am not a good accountant, but I believe you will find the interest right to a farthing,” and she pushed the money towards him.

The fair red face of the banker grew redder with a painful flush. He was fond of money, but he had never given any away with a satisfaction so exquisite as that which he had experienced when Margaret had gathered the notes together in her hands; and considering the poverty of the family, he had meant that it should have been considered a gift, and was mortified at the widow’s returning it. After a few minutes the touch of the guineas consoled him for their repossession, and he swept them into the ample pocket of his waistcoat with the small change, saying only, “Shall I give you a receipt?”

Mrs. Noble assured him it was of no consequence, and then began to wonder whether he

had entered it into his book as a loan, and whether she might be called on to repay it in case of his death.

So she began,—

“Perhaps you had better let me have a memorandum of its repayment, if it was entered as a loan.”

“You shall have it, certainly; but it was not entered as a loan.”

“Oh!” Mrs. Noble said, “thank you.”

Then Margaret and Cora returned to the room, which they had left at a look from their mother; and Mr. Bowles produced a neatly bound volume of “Bacon’s Essays,” as a gift to Margaret, and a set of small outlines from Raphael’s cartoons, for Cora. He knew that Margaret had desired to have the volume of Bacon; for Mr. Dred, the bookseller, had said, one day when Mr. Bowles went in to order some writing materials for the bank, which was an order worth having, and extracted an unusual amount of civility from the bookseller,—“Miss Noble, poor young lady, turned that book over and over again, and did not seem able to set it down. She asked the price; but you see,

sir, twelve-and-six is a big bit of money for them, though they keep themselves very genteel."

"Umph!" said the banker, "I don't think I have a copy of his *Essays* in my library—put it up for me."

Margaret got very red on receiving the book, and did not half like the obligation. Cora did her utmost to seem, and to be, grateful, but she did not admire Raphael's cartoons much, not having the educated eye of an artist.

"If he had but have given me that little volume of the *Lusiad* now! Ah! Margaret," she said, when they were alone, "there is such an illustration in it by Westall—such a frontispiece,

Dragged from her bower by murderous ruffians,  
Before a frowning king fair Inez stands.

She is in a dark flowing dress, and seeth a divine uplifted face!"

Margaret looked at her sister tenderly.

"I wish I could afford to buy it for her," she thought; but she had but twenty pounds yearly of her own, left by a distant relative, and of this she gave ten to her mother to pay for her board.

Mr. Bowles—or as Mrs. Noble always spitefully

designated him, *that* Mr. Bowles, placed all his library at Margaret's disposal.

The "Death of Abel" and the "Exiles of Siberia," with "Zeluco," were the only works of fancy. Modern novels were unknown in Mr. Bowles' venerable collection of books, but he possessed most standard works of the best English authors; and after having devoured all the old serials—"Loungers," "Idlers," "Ramblers," "Tatlers," and "Spectators," Mrs. Noble and her daughters were glad of the diversity afforded by Pope's Translations of the Iliad and Odyssey.

But Mrs. Noble, whilst she took advantage of the civilities offered by Mr. Thomas Bowles, and allowed him to supply Cora with engravings to copy from the works of Angelica Kauffman, representing faces of almost impossible beauty, and limbs unconscious of muscular development, accepted the favour grudgingly.

She "crammed and blasphemed the feeder." She disliked the banker with a bitter jealousy and distaste.

He played on the flute—so had Halbert Noble. Folks praised his playing, and she thought of the skill of her deceased husband, and longed

with sad yearning for the breath that had filled his favourite instrument when his execution had extorted admiration even from the coldest listener.

Then Halbert drew landscapes and figures with the wild grace of untaught genius ; while the banker finished his pictures into the bluest of distances and the brownest of foregrounds. These framed and gilded, excited the admiration of the simple amateurs of the remote town of Trevedra, and Mrs. Noble could find none who cared for the unfinished drawings of her own dear love.

Tom Bowles had worked for wealth, and had obtained it. Halbert Noble had died in clutching glory, and folks had forgotten that he was brave.

Poor Tom Bowles had committed the sin of being alive, and a prosperous gentleman, when her husband was tossing about on his seaweed bed in the ocean depths. Still, he was the only link that connected her with her dead darling, and she consulted him on every occasion of importance, and was mostly guided by his opinion.

“I wonder,” he said, one day, when he called

just as the evening was closing in, "I wonder whether you have any friends who would give you and the girls a lift?"

"A lift!" said Mrs. Noble, nervously, and with the scarlet spot coming on her cheek.

"Yes. I meant no harm; only if you had some kind friend to ask the girls out sometimes, and let them see a little of the world. What is consonant with your age and position, madam, is not so fitting for these young ladies."

"Margaret is too delicate to leave home, or to see company."

"The more reason why Miss Cora should leave home, to have that intercourse with society which ought to be within reach of every young person not destined for a nunnery."

"Cora must take her chance, like other people," said Mrs. Noble, gloomily. "I had a female school friend who would have been kind to my girls had she lived. She was Cora's godmother, and was married to a wealthy country gentleman in Suffolk, a Mr. Helmingham, living at Abbotsbury Hall. He married again soon after the death of his wife, and I have not the slightest claim of acquaintanceship on her suc-

cessor. I have seen him frequently ; for he was at Cintra with his deceased wife for the benefit of her health, when I was there with my children ; and they were both indebted to my husband for many small kindnesses, which seemed doubly welcome in a strange land and amongst an alien people. I had not thought that poor Eliza was so near death then."

Tom Bowles made no further observation, and soon after took his leave.

"That foolish woman is as proud as Lucifer. Not strong, either. If she dies, there would be those poor girls left without a sixpence."

Then came a half-thought, started away from, that he might marry Margaret, and provide for one of them.

The idea took away his breath.

Then succeeded the remembrance of his home as it was,—the old, fatuous mother of ninety-four, sitting in the sunshine of his dining-room window ; the coarse-looking step-sister, so rough and uneducated ; the withered elder step-sister, so fine and genteel : the thought of these small home ties, fastening down the strong man with Liliputian fetters, made him sigh.

Margaret's refinement and intellect would have been so out of place amongst his women !

His garden was, as it were, planted with crab-apples, which had become grey and venerable from age. He must not uproot them for the sake of beautiful and productive young plants.

The banker's life was not free from thorns, though well-earned wealth had made him prosperous to the world's eye.

The result of his cogitations will be seen in the following letter :—

Trevedra, 18—

“ SIR,—The family of a gentleman and lady with whom you were well acquainted in Portugal are left, by the death of their father, Captain Noble, with no provision except that afforded by the widow's pension, which, I need not remind you, ceases on her death. I have thought that, from the opportunities afforded by your wealth and position, you might have it in your power to obtain some situation for the youngest as a nursery governess or companion to an elderly or invalid lady. Miss Cora Noble is only seventeen,

but she is well-mannered and attractive, and would not disgrace any society in which she may be placed.'

"Mrs. Noble is not aware of my application to you. She is an exceedingly proud woman; and should anything occur to you as likely to benefit her daughter, it would be better for it to appear as your own suggestion, and not the result of an application from myself. Begging you will pardon the seeming impertinence of this address from a stranger,

"I have the honour to remain, Sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"THOMAS BOWLES."

When Mr. Bowles had written this letter, he hesitated whether or not to send it.

It was strange that he should feel such awe of that spirited woman, who was not his wife or his lady-love, nor in any way related to him, that he dreaded her finding out that he desired to benefit her family without consulting her.

This interference was a very unbusiness-like proceeding, and he hesitated when he dropped the other letters into the post-office with the one

to Mr. Helmingham in his hand for half a second, and then let it follow the rest.

No notice was taken of Mr. Thomas Bowles's letter for some considerable time.

"Perhaps Mr. Helmingham may be from home. Perhaps he may be ill, or ~~has~~ his house full of company and be unable to write."

How often these excuses are made by the unfortunate writer of an unanswered letter to account for the silence he writhes under. It is far kinder to abridge the pangs of suspense, and deny a request at once.

Mr. Bowles, however, was not much to be pitied. He felt his dignity rather wounded, that was all.

## CHAPTER II.

It was an ancient, venerable hall,  
And once surrounded by a moat and wall.

\*       \*       \*       \*

How he loves the gloom

The sun-excluding window gives the room !  
Those broad brown stairs on which he loves to tread ;  
Those beams within—without that length of lead,  
On which the names of wanton boys appear  
Who died old men, and left memorials here ;  
Carvings of feet and hands, and knots, and flowers,  
The fruits of busy minds in idle hours.

CRABBE.

MR. HELMINGHAM found Mr. Bowles's letter spread out with many others on his library table by the valet whose place it was to distribute them to different members of the household.

He had married early in life, and his wife had brought him two sons. At her death he had felt his home despoiled of the charm of female society, and had married a beautiful woman past the prime of life, in whom he expected to

find the grace and ornament of his household.

She had been attacked by a paralytic seizure, and had been for some weeks dependent on his constant care and attention for her comfort and amusement.

Mr. Helmingham was the politest of men, but he had a great regard for his own health and his own happiness.

He had expected to be ministered to by his new wife, and had unexpectedly been called on to minister.

"It was all very well at first," he said ; "but she does not seem to recover the use of her right hand and foot. It would be very agreeable to have a nice, lady-like girl residing with us, to let me run up to town when I like without the certainty of being thought a brute. Noble ! Of course I remember them. The mother was a tall, dark, handsome woman. I forget the children. Father, a good, gallant fellow—far too dare-devil for my taste. Those men always get killed, and leave their families to be supported by voluntary contributions."

"I wonder what I ought to give the girl—a

necessity for female companionship, and concluded his account with a gracefully-worded petition that Mrs. Noble would spare one of her daughters to reside in his family, and that the young lady would accept the stipend of one hundred pounds yearly to repay the sacrifice of her time and society given for the comfort of an invalid.

In case Mrs. Noble accepted his proposition, he enclosed an order on the county bank for twenty-five pounds in advance of her daughter's salary.

To Mr. Thomas Bowles, Mr. Helmingham wrote a few lines of thanks for his valuable suggestions, of which he had availed himself.

When the postman delivered the letter from Suffolk before breakfast at Mrs. Noble's cottage, she looked first with a feeling of satisfaction at the word "Paid" in the corner, for any letter which cost one shilling and tenpence must have been unwelcome, and then deposited it on the table till she had read prayers to her two girls and old Betty. Her feeling of curiosity about it was but feeble, for the post-office had not for years conveyed to her any pleasurable in-

telligence, and she had ceased to expect any. The days were past, when the intelligence of a packet having reached Falmouth set her heart beating, and made her movements restless, till the thin stained letter, written within and without with expressions of undying tenderness towards her and her girls, was placed in her trembling fingers, after she had paced up and down outside the post-office for hours to wait for that blessing.

Four, sometimes five shillings, sometimes double and treble that sum was taken from her small store to pay for those priceless proofs of love from her absent husband.

She looked on life now as the sailor's wife who has seen her husband's ship go down in sight of land.

Storm or sunshine were alike indifferent to her, since he could neither suffer from the one nor enjoy the other.

Her sallow face flushed, however, on reading Mr. Helmingham's letter, and she laid it down in silence whilst she poured out the tea. Then she became very pale, so that Margaret asked anxiously if she were ill.

She replied in the negative, and pushed the letter towards her.

"Cora may read it also," she said, in a tremulous voice.

When the girls had read it, Margaret exclaimed—

"Oh, mother ! she must not go!"

And Cora, at the same moment—

"Oh, mamma ! I must accept it. Fancy ! what a sum ! more than we have to live on altogether. I should be able to help you and Margaret. Margaret could have lodgings at the sea-side; and," in a low voice, "I might have some shoes."

Mrs. Noble winced. She had been unwarrantably cross about those shoes, she knew.

"I don't know what to say about accepting the offer, Cora. Do you know how great is the distance between Cornwall and Suffolk ? In case of either of us being seriously ill, we could not meet, probably, till the event of life or death was determined."

Cora was silent for a few moments, and then said—"Anything is better than living in such pinching poverty."

"No; it would not be better to live with greater luxury, and incur debts, consequently, which we could not pay," said Mrs. Noble.

"But here it is not a question of debt," rejoined Cora, impatiently. "There is a hundred a year to be earned, and I could earn it. There are not many things I could do, but I can give my time and patience to an invalid lady."

"Suppose," said Margaret, flushing slightly, "that we consult Mr. Thomas Bowles?"

"Yes, yes," said both the mother and Cora; "we will consult Mr. Thomas."

Margaret hoped he would decide against the plan: she dreaded for her sister's well-doing so far away, and amongst strangers, and she thought Mr. Thomas would decide in favour of her idea of the subject.

Mrs. Noble, who felt the difficulties of her situation as manager of their small income, as only housekeepers can feel, was divided between her wish to keep Cora at home and to have the benefits resulting from her absence.

Cora herself longed to escape from the thraldom of poverty.

"Oh, 'tis so wearing—so grinding," she would

say to Margaret. "It puts up a moral turnpike whichever way one would turn for benefit or amusement,—' You cannot afford this. Oh, where are you going to get the money to pay for that ?' Of all troubles, that of poverty is the greatest !"

Margaret said, softly,—

" Not quite."

And Cora knew that she alluded to her own infirm health.

Cora put on her bonnet, and went down into the town, bearing a note from her mother to Mr. Bowles, begging him to call that evening.

Mr. Bowles sent a verbal message that he would come, as he was too busy to write. He knew all about it, and was prepared to be consulted on the occasion.

When he arrived, they were sitting in the dusk at the back of the house, looking into the garden, which had been separated from the common on which the cottage was built.

The house was covered with sweet peas, principally purple, and nasturtiums, which Mrs. Noble had trained up to the height of six or

seven feet, charmed by the contrasting colours of orange and purple.

They had pleased her eyes when seen in apposition, as they had delighted the vision of Vandyke ; but the exercise of his taste, evinced in his pictures, charmed the world, whilst Mrs. Noble's horticulture only pleased herself and her girls.

Mrs. Noble placed the letter before her friend, and Mr. Thomas Bowles was astonished at the liberality of the terms offered.

“Upon my word, you are a very fortunate young lady, Miss Cora ! May I ask upon what point you wish to consult me ?”

“My mother doubted as to whether I should accept the offer. I am very anxious to do so myself.”

“You are a sensible girl.”

“But,” said Mrs. Noble, “Cora is so young, and it is so very far.”

“Miss Cora will, unfortunately, grow older every day, ma'am—a misfortune, certainly, when one sees how very charming she is now ; and as for the distance, it would be a good reason for any ignorant woman who has lived in Trevedra

all her days ; but I am astonished to hear a lady who has travelled all over the Continent put forward such a reason as a valid excuse."

"There's a difference," Mrs. Noble said, but she could not go on. She was thinking it was very different to travel with her husband, or to join him, and to send a girl three hundred miles alone, to reside with strangers.

"I don't see how she could reach Abbotsbury," she said, at last.

"She might travel with Susan Mead, who is going as dairy-maid to a friend of mine near London, to teach his folks the mystery of making Cornish cream. If Mr. Helmingham could send to meet Miss Cora in London it would be an arrangement equally beneficial to both parties."

"I suppose the maid will take an outside place," said Mrs. Noble, "and cannot be any protection to Cora, who will be inside."

"Could I not go outside also?" suggested Cora.  
"Impossible!"

"I have no doubt that can be arranged. Mead's manner of going will depend on me, and her future master will not trouble himself about the difference between an outside and an inside fare."

Mrs. Noble felt her objections removed as soon as she had stated them, and though she had still doubt and anxiety on her mind, yet she wrote a grateful acceptance of Mr. Helmingham's offer, and busied herself in the purchase of a simple wardrobe for Cora out of the money forwarded by the owner of Abbotsbury, reserving sufficient to pay Cora's journey.

When the day arrived Mr. Bowles, not having been invited to tea on the previous evening, as he had fully anticipated, appeared at the coach office, and after shaking hands with Cora, he took up her reticule to observe the cypher on it, as he said, and to find fault with the improper and broken-backed shape of the C, and took advantage of the inspection to drop into it a little canvas bag containing five guineas, as he knew Cora would want pocket-money before her next quarter became due.

Cora, who was doing hard battle with her tears and sobs, kissed her mother and old Betty, and shook hands with Mr. Bowles, all unconscious that her reticule was so much heavier than when she had first left the cottage.

She found it out before the end of her first

day's journey, and resolved to write and thank her kind friend so soon as she arrived at Abbotsbury.

She slept in London at an hotel, and the next morning her female companion was sought out by one of her future fellow servants, but she loyally refused to leave Miss Cora till the servant had come for her also.

She had not long to wait. A grave-looking, respectable butler inquired for "A young lady going down to visit his mistress," and, finding that she was utterly ignorant of travelling, he placed her inside a coach destined for Ipswich, and took his place on the outside.

Cora had been so much fatigued by many days of incessant travelling, that she was nearly asleep when the coach stopped, and she had to remove herself to a postchaise for a fifteen miles' drive. She awoke again on hearing the gravel crunch under the wheels of the carriage, and looked out, dizzy and confused, at the long streams of light from the old stained-glass windows, inside each of which was placed a brilliant lamp. It seemed to her something very wonderful and rather awful, for the brilliant colours shewed more vividly from their dark brick surroundings.

She had not time to arrange her ideas, when the massive doors were flung open and she was received by two sleepy footmen. Before she had spoken a syllable, a smart lady's-maid advanced and stated that she had been desired by her mistress to attend Miss Noble to her room, and to order for her tea or coffee. There were already in the ante-room wines of different kinds, soda-water, lemonade, &c.

Cora walked on as if in a dream up the magnificent stone staircase, through the passages to the rooms appointed for her use. She passed into her sleeping room to take off her bonnet and cloak, and her luggage was brought to the ante-room, and transported by the maid to her bedroom, when she dismissed her, and threw off the dirty and travel-stained clothes she had been unable to change for so many hours, and flung herself into the bed; which astonished her by a reception so tender, that she was seized by a momentary feeling that she should sink into unknown depths.

Her bed at home had been a small camp bed, belonging to her late father, and was as hard as stone, without the advantage of smoothness.

She was too weary to sorrow for the dear ones so distant—too weary to feel anxious for the morrow, but she fell asleep with the rumbling of wheels vibrating in fancy through her brain; a disturbance which coloured the phantoms of her slumbers.

She fancied that she was wandering over an illimitable plain in darkness, in profound solitude, and pursued by the mutterings of incessant peals of thunder.

### CHAPTER III.

The moat was there, and there on all the ground  
Tall elms and ancient oaks stretched far around ;  
And where the soil forbade the nobler race,  
Dwarf trees and humbler shrubs had found their place,  
Forbidding man in their close hold to go,  
Haw, garter, holm, the service and the sloe ;  
With tangled weeds that at the bottom grew,  
And climbers above all their feathery branches threw.

THE light glimmered faintly through the closed shutters and rich damask curtains, but it did not arouse Cora, and she was startled when the maid entering her room told her it was nine o'clock, and enquired whether she would prefer a warm or cold bath, to be prepared in the bath room leading from her sleeping apartment.

She was rather relieved on finding that her services would not be immediately desired, as Mrs. Helmingham was never visible till one o'clock, and that her breakfast would be brought into the ante-room at any hour she chose to order it.

When she had concluded her morning meal, and had begun a letter to Margaret, written in the smallest of hands, to save postage, which could be ill spared by her mother, she grew impatient of seclusion in the handsome apartments which she occupied.

She asked the female servant who came to remove the salver which had contained her breakfast, if she could walk out anywhere, where she might be sure of being uninterrupted ; and the girl good-naturedly conducted her out by a side door into a dense wilderness, where she assured Cora she would find a pathway, and seats if she should be tired, and she would hear the luncheon bell at one o'clock to warn her to return to the house.

“ I’m afraid you’ll find it a dismal place to walk in, Miss,” said the maid, but Cora thanked her, and thought she had never seen anything so beautiful. The walks were over-grown with moss ; and tall grass had sprung up on each side, which being uncut had turned yellow and seeded, and matted together made a support for the wild convolvuli. Shading the retreat were forest trees, oaks, and majestic elms, with firs and acacia, at the roots of which the roses shewed proof of past

culture, as they supported themselves against the giant trunks. Here and there funereal urns shone out, white and soft yellow against their background of yew and holly—that holly which has all the grace and more than the beauty of the willow, played in the soft breeze, and bent its sparkling leaves, throwing alternate light and shade on every object near it. Sometimes an elm cut off in its prime by the parasitical ivy, which had so fatally clasped it, had fallen across the path, and remained resting its broken trunk on some stronger neighbour opposite; occasionally an opening in the trees shewed glimpses of woodland beauty in the distant park.

Herds of deer rested in the shadows of the old trees, or bounded along the line of sunshine to some covert more secluded.

The dew still hung on the shadowed verdure, though the sun had exhaled it in the open country.

Cora stopped in a quiet rapture.

“Ah!” she said, “I do not envy rich people their costly carpets and damask hangings, but I do envy them these lovely secluded walks which the poor can never enjoy. They have no such

retreats, no such beautiful combinations of majestic trees and rare shrubs. No place in which they can enjoy solitude, in which they can ramble or loiter, and say, ‘No one can disturb me here. It is mine.’ How happy rich people must be!”

She stood still for a few moments a little removed from the path, under the shadow of and partly concealed by the trunk of a magnificent elm tree, and wished for Margaret to sympathize with her enjoyment of Nature in a place so beautiful, when she saw a gentleman coming with a light and elastic step through the wilderness. He was fashionably dressed in the costume of the period, and singularly handsome.

He, too, looked at the trees earnestly enough, and chose for the objects of his attention, not the most picturesque, but the straightest and best-grown.

His eyes were light grey. His skin faultless, and his hair curled in waves of gold under his hat.

“Oh! I did not know they had sons, or I had forgotten it,” said Cora to herself, as without seeing her he crossed into a different path.  
“How beautiful he is!”

A large dog came bounding after him, but more alert than his master, he detected the fair young stranger by the elm tree, and sprung towards her. The dead branch of a thorn acacia lay across the path, and the dog mistaking the distance, alighted with his fore paw on one of the thorns, which ran deeply into his foot. He sat down holding up his injured paw, howling dismaly, and Cora went towards him and examined the foot, and was busy in trying to extract the thorn when Mr. Rufus Helmingham came back at a quick pace, thinking that his pointer had been caught in a snare.

"If you will hold his leg still," said Cora, "I think I can pull out the thorn."

Mr. Rufus obeyed without speaking, and Cora taking from a small case a pair of tweezers, extracted the broken spike of acacia.

The dog shook himself free, and the young man and the maiden stood up at the same moment and looked at each other. The youth lifted his hat respectfully, and thanked her for the aid she had afforded his favourite, and then bowing again, pursued his way.

"I wonder if they will all be as unsocial as

this young gentleman," she said. "Is he shy, or proud, or only unready in speech?" The interview had destroyed her pleasure in the wilderness, as she had lost the comfort of seclusion. She remained, however, till the luncheon bell rang, and then returned to her room; and when she had made her slight preparations for going down, she rang and asked the servant to show her the way to the dining-room.

As she entered the apartment by one door, a slender and rather tall gentleman advanced towards her by another, and coming up, bowed and held out his hand very cordially.

Mr. Helmingham, for it was he, was agreeably surprised at Miss Noble's appearance.

"Attractive, indeed! she is beautiful!" he thought; so he poured out a profusion of polite inquiries about her mother and sister—whether she had suffered much fatigue during her long journey, &c. &c.; and placing her next to himself at the table, he attended to her wishes as regarded food.

"What! nothing but strawberries and bread? Let me mix you some with wine and sugar. No? Pray do not drink water alone. Let me put

some wine with it. What will Mrs. Noble say if you lose that exquisite look of health you now possess, whilst you reside at Abbotsbury."

Cora thanked him, and suggested that as she had drank water all her life, she was unlikely to require any stronger fluid now.

Then they talked of the aspect of the counties through which Miss Noble had passed, and Mr. Helmingham smiled to hear her lamentations for the hilly country she had left, and to listen to her description of feelings of suffocation on a flat country, from which she could not raise herself to any eminence to look around her.

"I fear we cannot accommodate you here with anything like a mountain or a hill; but you must admit that we are, though not sublime as you, I daresay, consider yourselves in the west countries, far more cultivated, and therefore more beautiful than Cornwall."

"I am content," said Cora. "The sublime has a deeper effect on the mind than the merely beautiful."

"I am not sure," said the gentleman, "that the simply beautiful, without any admixture of

sublimity, does not make a deeper impression on my mind than is agreeable to a staid gentleman like myself," and he bowed and smiled as if he meant the compliment to be appropriated by Cora.

Before Cora could consider what she should say in reply, the door opened, and Mr. Rufus Helmingham entered, with a grave bow to his father and Miss Noble.

Mr. Helmingham had risen and returned the salutation, and then, addressing his guest, said—

"Permit me to introduce to your notice my second son, Rufus."

"Oh ! I"—said Cora : but as she spoke she caught the unmistakable expression, cautioning her to silence, in the sudden flash of eyes from a downcast face, which his father did not perceive, and she stopped awkwardly.

"I was not aware," she went on, with glowing cheeks, "that you had a son so old," thinking that the best way of finishing her sentence.

Mr. Helmingham looked at her heightened complexion, and hoped that Rufus did not think

Miss Noble as handsome as he himself did. The young man, if he did so, gave no outward sign, and sat down silently to the discussion of his luncheon.

## CHAPTER IV.

Interest is the most prevailing cheat,  
The sly seducer both of Age and Youth,  
They study that, and think they study truth ;  
Where interest fortifies an argument,  
Weak reason serves to gain the will's assent,  
For souls already warped receive an easy bent.

DRYDEN.

MR. HELMINGHAM still conversed with Cora, but in a tone more grave and stiff than before the entrance of his son.

He continued to do so with civil effort till Rufus had finished eating, when Mr. Helmingham arose and proposed to Cora that he should introduce her to his wife.

“ I consider you my especial charge, Miss Noble,” he said, politely, “ for we—I mean my first dear wife and I—were indebted for much kindness to your father and Mrs. Noble at Cintra. In those remote days there was hope, anxiety,

and gratitude for me ; now both hope and anxiety are extinct—gratitude only remains.”

He pressed her hand, which he had taken to conduct her through the apartments leading to those occupied by Mrs. Helmingham, and Cora did not resent what seemed to her the exuberance only of old-fashioned gallantry.

Mrs. Helmingham was lying on a sofa in a richly-furnished boudoir.

She turned her head restlessly as the door opened, and her face lighted up with a generous expression of pleasure at the sight of the blooming girl whom her husband ushered into her apartment ; for the invalid lady had been herself a great beauty, and spent many hours in the care and cultivation of those charms which had lingered on into the autumn of her life.

She had been considered like the portraits of Mary Stuart, and adopted a somewhat similar headdress, which became her well.

“ I am sure,” she said, sweetly, stretching forth her left hand, “ we shall be very, very good friends.”

Cora murmured something about hoping to deserve her good opinion, as her eyes wandered

to the right hand of her patroness, which was lying uselessly by her side.

"I will leave you to become better known to each other," said Mr. Helmingham, "and I am sure the result will be satisfactory to each lady," added this Chesterfield of domestic life.

After Mr. Helmingham had withdrawn, Mrs. Helmingham asked Cora a few polite questions, and then inquired if she would mind reading aloud.

"I am circumscribed in my amusements by my infirmities," she said, sadly, "and perhaps you will think me excessive in my pursuit of the very few pleasures which remain to me."

Cora spoke eagerly,—

"Oh, no! I cannot think so. I shall be so glad if I can add in any degree to your comfort. I can read aloud a long time without feeling fatigue," she added, thinking of Pope's translation of the "*Iliad*," and of her seemingly interminable readings thereof.

Mrs. Helmingham directed Cora to a box of books from the Minerva Press, and told her to take out "*Thaddeus of Warsaw*," just published, by Miss Porter.

Mrs. Helmingham found her voice charming. Her manner of reading she considered spirited without being theatrical. She was delighted with her new companion—her freshly-imported toy.

A little girl with a new doll will never rest till she has arrayed her favourite in the most costly dress she can procure, and her old dolls are stript of all their treasures of clothes for the sake of the new baby.

Mrs. Helmingham was violent and sudden in her friendships, or rather likings. Whilst these lasted the object of them was arrayed in every virtue which had ever adorned a saint. Every grace which had ever beautified the Queen of Love.

When the fancy declined she, at first, denuded her friend of the graces and virtues with which she had invested her, and then proceeded to attribute the most opposite faults to her previous idol.

Cora knew nothing of this disposition, and was elated at finding herself so highly appreciated. It made her almost happy, even separated as she was from her sister Margaret, so dearly loved.

She would write her a long letter by-and-by, and she blessed her friend Tom Bowles for the sum which would enable her to post-pay her double letters, so as not to increase the burthen which rested so heavily on those dear shoulders at home.

When the reading had concluded Cora trimmed and watered some plants on a stand, by Mrs. Helmingham's direction.

"I like to see life and progress," said the lady, "their springing bulbs and opening blossoms give me an idea of youth and vitality, which is agreeable to me, from its contrast to my own state. You shall ask the gardener to-day to give you some cuttings of carnations, and if you plant them yourself, and bring the flower-pot here, we shall both have an interest in their growth. They have very fine varieties here in the greenhouses, and you can take them back to Mrs. Noble when you go home for your holiday."

She smiled a self-satisfied smile. She knew she had spoken judiciously and kindly, and that in giving the girl an interest in her occupations, she had done much to attract her companion, whilst in alluding to Miss Noble's returning home

"for a holiday," she had indicated a wish to keep her permanently.

Whilst the two ladies were thus talking pleasantly, a delicate-looking note, with a bunch of hothouse flowers, was brought up on a silver salver by Mrs. Helmingham's footman, with Mr. Rufus Helmingham's compliments, and he would do himself the pleasure of paying his personal respects to Mrs. Helmingham in twenty minutes' time. A cynical smile passed over the lady's face as she read the note and tossed it aside.

"A curious caligraphic performance," she said. "His writing is so like that of his brother, that except from the signature one can never tell the difference."

"Probably the gentlemen had the same writing-master in their boyhood," suggested Cora, finding it difficult to talk on a subject of which she knew nothing.

"Yes, that was the case, and I suppose it accounts for the resemblance, but Rufus can simulate any kind of handwriting. He is handsome. Do you not consider him so?"

"Yes, very; but very silent, is he not?"

"Ah! their father had very strict notions about

keeping his sons in subjection. You know I am but their stepmother, and I have nothing to gain or to lose by our connexion, but I find they prefer my society infinitely to that of their father, before whom they were taught as boys never to utter a word, till now that they have become men the habit of reserve has remained to a degree, which is painful to me to witness, and which I think may be dangerous to them to act on."

"What a very melodious voice has Mr. Rufus Helmingham," observed Cora.

"Yes, his tongue drops manna," said the lady, drily.

"Does his brother resemble him in person?" observed Cora, not caring for the answer; but thinking herself bound to continue the conversation.

"No, not at all. Edmond has not his brother's beauty of person. He is tall and well made, but lacks the loveliness of face, which seems like a glorious crown at the summit of a fine figure. I think he is quite aware of his brother's advantages over himself, and that the consciousness makes him silent, almost sad."

"Has their father a favourite in either more than the other?"

Mrs. Helmingham gave a little short laugh.

"It must be a cleverer person than myself who can decide that question, a very important one to the young men. Mr. Helmingham came into his very large property on the death of a distant relation. This immense amount of wealth is strictly entailed on one of the two sons, but as the testator knew that the certainty of succeeding to a large property always made the future recipient idle and generally worthless, he devised that the fortunate son selected should be kept in ignorance of the future, and fitted to fight his way in the world, with the aid of a simple one hundred pounds per annum, which is to be all the possessions of the unfortunate son."

"This," continued the lady, with a sharp glance at her companion, "is likely to keep both young men in subjection to their father, and to prevent the possibility of their making an imprudent marriage. I never yet saw a woman worth the sacrifice of thirty thousand per annum."

"And the plan has answered very well hitherto?"

said Cora, who felt uncomfortable at this first feeling that the rose had thorns, and pricked intentionally.

"Yes," replied the lady; "sometimes I give my footman a bone to be carried out for one of my two dogs. Both follow him with wistful eyes and depressed tails. They each jump up to catch it. If he would but wait an instant, they would sit up and beg, but they have a conviction that he would not alter his intentions whatever they might plead. At length the bone is dropped, and the fortunate dog gnaws it, and the other makes frantic efforts to possess himself of the treasure, and they hate each other as only dogs and brothers can."

"What a terrible picture!" said Cora, thoughtlessly.

"Yes; if human nature be terrible."

"Oh! I could never feel thus towards my Margaret," replied the girl, with tearful eyes.

"I daresay not," said Mrs. Helmingham, kindly; "but be not too proud. You have never felt temptation. Recollect: 'Is thy servant a dog——' But here comes Rufus. I hope he will not stay long. I am always on my guard in-

voluntarily before him, and I am too indolent to like the effort of keeping ‘my mouth as it were with a bridle’——”

“‘Whilst the ungodly are in your sight,’ ” said Cora, finishing the quotation, with a smile.

“Exactly; ah! that David was a wise man in most things, though he could not resist temptation, like other folks.”

“David knew that the ungodly would find many more meanings in his words than he intended.”

“There is nothing so difficult to maintain as reserve towards a reserved person, though you would not think this at first. If one is polite one feels the necessity of finding conversation, especially as mistress of the house. It seems a duty as sacred as the provision of bread and salt. If you talk to a person who makes but small, or no response, you naturally increase the conversational power, in the hope of getting over the icy barrier of reserve presented by your non-respondent, till you find that you have said more than you ought, or that it was safe to say; then you change the reading of the proverb, and think, ‘a fool and his words are soon parted,’ and look silly in your own eyes, and in those of

the person who has taken advantage of your folly."

Rufus entered, and his stepmother presented her hand very cordially, and he with a graceful gallantry kissed it before he laid it carefully down on the folds of her purple silken dress. She began talking eagerly about the flowers he had sent her, and whether they had come from her hothouse.

"Do not think me such a young Nero, who presented to his mother dresses which she considered her own by right, and got snubbed in consequence. I sent to London for these, and think that they are a marvel of freshness considering the distance from town and the hours they spent on the road. All flowers do not, like human beauties, bloom in fresh loveliness after a toilsome journey." He gave Cora a look and a slight bow to mark the compliment.

After the flowers had been commented on, Mrs. Helmingham asked Rufus if he would show Miss Noble over the hothouses and gardens. She supposed Mr. Helmingham was engaged.

"He has ridden out," said Rufus, who rose willingly to attend Miss Noble.

"Get your hat, my dear, and then return here, or you will lose your way in this great house."

When Cora had closed the door, "A beautiful girl!" said the lady.

"Passable," replied Rufus, indifferently, who thought her by far the most beautiful creature he had ever seen.

"I think her lovely!" said Mrs. Helmingham.

"Ah! madame, you are so charmingly charitable in the conscious plenitude of your own good looks," said her stepson.

Just then Cora returned, and the young people departed for their walk.

"I have warned her," was Mrs. Helmingham's thought,—then, "I wonder if any one ever took a warning on such a subject, however well meant."

"I will not speak," thought Cora. "I am not a hostess, bound to find conversation. I can be as reserved as he."

Yet she could not help feeling attracted by the deference with which she was treated by her

companion, who put aside intrusive boughs of rose trees from her path with great assiduity, and led her carefully down a slope of slippery turf that they might sooner reach the greenhouse.

He spoke at length.

"I was so grateful to you at luncheon time, Miss Noble, for not announcing to my father, as I feared you were about to do, the pleasure I had had in meeting you unexpectedly in the wilderness."

Cora coloured. She felt that she was praised for what seemed to her deceit, and certainly had amounted to concealment of the truth.

"I am glad I satisfied you by my silence, for I would much rather have told the truth, and it is some compensation that my reticence gave pleasure to some one. But might I ask," she said, "why you silenced me by a look so full of meaning?"

"You do not know my father, nor the suppositions which he builds upon airy foundations. He always suspects some scheme, and that we cannot 'take our tea without a stratagem.' Had you finished your speech that we had met pre-

viously to his introduction, he would have believed that I had schemed to have you directed to walk in the wilderness that I might have the pleasure of meeting you there."

"How dreadful!" said Cora.

"Dreadful to meet me there? I daresay Ponto would have thought it very dreadful not to have met you."

"I meant dreadful to be continually suspected."

"The result is, that I take as my motto 'Least said soonest mended.' Do not judge of me as you see me in the presence of others," he continued, looking pleadingly into her face with a beautiful expression of candour in his. "Alone with you I feel I may speak freely, without your suspecting any concealed motive. I am in eternal conflict with the social part of my nature in the presence of my father and stepmother. He is but a reflection of her—or rather, I should say, she gives to him her impression of all my sayings and doings. I absolve her from any intentional misrepresentation, but if truth's glass happens to be ill-blown, it reflects objects crookedly, and by this obliquity I am generally the sufferer. I

have often wished," he continued, looking at Cora with an expression of tender interest, "that fortune had blessed me with a sister, such as yourself, to whom I might have confided all those trifles of daily life which form the sum of human things."

"That seems to me unusual," said Cora. "I never wanted a brother, because I never had one; and a girl born without her left hand once assured me that, could she ever have been reconstructed with the absent limb replaced, she should be puzzled to know what to do with it. Besides, you have a brother, and a friend in him."

"Yes, I have, and I have not. He is, I believe, a very fine, gallant fellow; but since he was fourteen and I twelve we have not met. He is thirty, and I am twenty-eight. During the short intervals when he has been on shore I was at Winchester or at college, and my father did not choose my studies to be interrupted by 'sentimental' interviews, as he called them. However, I shall soon renew our fraternal relations, I expect, for his ship, the *Ariadne*, is coming into port to be paid off, and he will

return home for some weeks—till he is appointed to another, I suppose. But it is uncivil to bore you with family affairs already, and here we are at the carnation beds. Will you select the shoots yourself, or trust to the gardener?"

"Ah!" said Cora, laughing, "I never trust any judgment but my own."

"Certainly. Ladies of seventeen are sure to be unerring in judgment," Rufus replied, with a little air of mock gravity.

"At any event," replied Cora, "I will choose my own carnations," and she flushed slightly; adding, "you need not be so satirical."

"I did not so intend my remark," said Rufus, in the sweetest tone, "and I rejoice in the fearless consciousness of clear perceptions which makes you assert your right of unbiassed judgment."

"I only entreat that you will not abrogate it when you are called on to judge me."

"Who are to be your accusers, and have you—can you have any?"

"I think that my stepmother may just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike. My father, on the contrary, will lay before you all the sins of my

youth up to the present time. Do not flatter yourself that this mark of confidence is peculiar to yourself. He will go through the same narration to every one who will listen to him ; he will act the afflicted father to every one who will consent to be audience, that they may go away and pity ‘poor Mr. Helmingham’s’ domestic misfortunes.”

Cora looked very grave ; she did not like the image her companion represented.

“ ‘Tis well for Edmond,” he continued, “that his gallantry has been spoken of in despatches on several occasions. Otherwise, his father might moan over his cowardice as well as my unpaid bills.”

Cora began to see that there were woes in the world besides that of poverty, and her heart turned yearningly towards her absent mother and sister.

“ Do not let us think of anything hard or disagreeable,” she said, looking up sadly in his face, “in the midst of a scene so beautiful. Here are my selected cuttings, and now we will ask one of the gardeners for a flowerpotful of damp mould.”

Then she talked of the pleasure she should have in showing them to her mother, and planting them in their small garden; and Rufus led her on to speak of her home and her relatives, it being an axiom of that young man ever to find out all that he could with regard to those with whom he was thrown into contact, for the chance of future possible advantage to himself.

He saw that Cora was beautiful; he found her sincere and artless in her conversation. Always having lived amongst those to whom falsehood was unknown, she believed implicitly all that she heard.

"I hope," he thought, "that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Helmingham will ever make to her statements contradictory of my own, or the poor girl will be fearfully puzzled whom to believe—would set it down as a mistake, no doubt, and try to rectify it. She is really *too* good—too simple."

Cora could not talk too much of her home for her own gratification. The scene was vividly and tenderly delineated for the satisfaction of Rufus.

"Poor and beautiful!" he meditated—"out of the question as a wife." And then his thoughts wandered to other relations, which he checked by thinking, "My father would be furious if he ever suspected it."

The conversation, which was drawing to a close, impressed the young girl very favourably towards Rufus. He was so handsome, so polite; he was the first young gentleman who had ever said a kind word to her—and this man was so deferential! There is no flattery so subtle as deference.

Cora's opinion had never been regarded by her mother and cleverer sister, and here was this fine gentleman canvassing her, as it were, for her good estimation of his life and character.

He was very charming, and gave her all the consideration and homage which any woman might have rejoiced to receive from one so gifted by nature and education.

Had Cora been an old woman, instead of a blooming girl, Mr. Rufus Helmingham would have been equally devoted in his politeness, as he had been brought up to consider such atten-

tions to the weaker sex as the distinguishing characteristics of a gentleman.

In this opinion he was, of course, utterly wrong, as is proved by the conduct of young men in the present day.

## CHAPTER V.

Did you ever see  
Limbs better turned—a prettier boy than he?  
His senses all acute, his passions such  
As Nature gave; she never does too much.  
His the bold wish the cup of joy to gain,  
And strength to bear it without qualm or pain.

CRABBE.

THEY returned to the apartments of Mrs. Helmingham, Rufus carrying the flowerpot and saucer to place it on the stand.

Cora deposited her hat in her bedroom, and, in her absence, Mrs. Helmingham asked Rufus—

“ How do you find her?”

“ Oh, very agreeable, very innocent, and rather dull !”

“ Not Cornish cream ?”

“ No; scalt milk, as they call it in her country.”

Rufus bowed and withdrew; and Cora resumed her readings till it was time to dress for

dinner. She looked wistfully at her patroness, in the hope she might be allowed to eat with her ; but Mrs. Helmingham told her she would dine with Mr. Helmingham and Rufus, and that she would, she hoped, return to her after the dessert had been concluded.

Accordingly, she went into the drawing-room when the dinner-bell rang, and found Rufus, who began to speak to her in a subdued voice ; but hearing his father's step on the stairs, he removed to another part of the room, leaving Cora standing awkwardly, with suspicious blushes on her face, in the middle of the carpet.

Mr. Helmingham's eyes glanced furtively at her, and then darted a look towards Rufus, who was standing pretending to examine a portfolio of sketches.

" You don't seem to have made yourself particularly agreeable to Miss Noble," said the father, drily.

Rufus always looked his interrogator full in the face, with the most open-eyed expression of candour.

" My dear father," he said, " first believe that I never pretend to your powers of fascina-

tion in conversation. Secondly, that I always give up the hungry moments after the dinner-bell has rung as being utterly unimproveable. Thirdly, had I had the desire to try, unless I had spoken through a speaking-trumpet, it would have been a useless expenditure of breath, as Miss Noble had only just entered the room by one door as you appeared at the other."

Mr. Helmingham looked at Cora to read in her face if the story were true. She looked down, and tried to give no sign.

It was nearly true—not quite; so she was silent. She would not on any account have gotten Rufus into disgrace with his father, but she was uncomfortable, and began to think with Mrs. Helmingham that David was a wise man when he determined to keep his mouth, as it were, with a bridle. She only wished that her countenance could be schooled into as perfect subjection.

She was escorted down with great solemnity by Mr. Helmingham, and seated by his side while Rufus sat at the bottom of the table.

The conversation, such as it was, was carried on between the master of the house and Cora.

Rufus said nothing, though Mr. Helmingham had the air of sometimes inviting him to join in the subjects under discussion.

Cora was free from affectation. She spoke of facts which she knew with modesty, and confessed her ignorance when she was unacquainted with the subject of conversation with perfect readiness.

She was enabled to give him some valuable information about a mine in which he had been invited to take shares. Cora had heard the affairs of the adventurers discussed by Mr. Bowles and her mother, and dissuaded Mr. Helmingham from joining the venture.

"I am more decided in what I state," she continued, "because our friend said, when my mother inquired how the working of the mine could be carried on without more funds, that the proprietors would probably try to obtain money by selling shares to gentlemen in distant counties who were precluded from their locality from the knowledge of the risk they would run."

Mr. Helmingham thanked her warmly, and for once, sincerely. He looked at her admir-

ingly, and thought what a charming and intelligent countenance she had.

"A sharp girl she would be where her own interests were concerned," thought his son.

After the dessert had been on the table a short time, Miss Noble rose, and Mr. Helmingham attended her to the door with a profound bow, Rufus having also risen. She walked quickly along the corridors to the chamber of her patroness, whose face brightened as Cora entered.

"I'm glad you are come. I want to know about the horse," she said; "and my eyes ache with reading long."

"May I stay here till you retire for the night?" said Cora, anxiously.

"Yes," said the lady, with a little laugh. "But do you not like your companions?"

"Oh, yes; of course, ma'am! but I feel more in my proper place by your side."

"You are right, Miss Noble, and speak like a prudent young lady. You will understand that your time is your own till two o'clock: after that I shall be glad to enjoy your society, excepting when you are partaking of the family

meals. You will be welcome to come and go as you please from my room. Try to think it is your mother's apartment, and we shall both be happier if we can cherish the idea. I shall have the comfort of a daughter, you the sympathy and protection of a dear relative."

She drew Cora's head towards her, and kissed her forehead slightly.

In the evening Mr. Helmingham came up to play piquet with his lady, but Rufus did not appear; and Cora took a book till ten o'clock, when Mrs. Helmingham dismissed her to bed.

Without any apparent intention on the part of Rufus, he contrived to meet Cora constantly, both in the house and in the grounds. This he could do with impunity before one o'clock, as neither his father nor his step-mother were visible before that hour.

On the day subsequent to that, the progress of which we have narrated, he overtook Cora as she was strolling through the wilderness, and challenged her to a walk through the woods to look for ferns. He was provided with a flat basket, and a spade to remove the roots, which

he intended to place in an ornamental tub, to gratify his stepmother.

The idea pleased Cora ; and her girlish love of activity made the prospect more agreeable than walking alone in the wilderness. It seemed churlish also to refuse, and finding as many reasons as most people do for pleasing herself in assenting to the request, she accompanied him.

The expedition was both harmless and agreeable ; and two young persons engaged in a good-natured act intended to give pleasure, both singularly handsome, in the morning of the day, and the morning of their life, would have been a pleasant picture to witness to those who saw the surface only.

Rufus enjoyed the proximity of this beautiful young woman, and enjoyed also her shrewd and unaffected observations ; but he had no idea of drawing down his father's displeasure on himself, by the semblance of seeking her society. As they returned through the wilderness, he made some trifling excuse for returning to the house another way, and left her.

"What a coward!" was Cora's thought. "If

I am worth seeking, I am worth avowing. I shall not walk with Mr. Rufus again."

The best laid schemes of deception may fail.

Mr. Helmingham happened to go to his dressing room rather later than usual that morning, and the window overlooked the wilderness. He leaned against the window sill absently, waiting till his valet should answer the bell preparatory to shaving him, with a worried consciousness that he was late and that the luncheon bell would ring before he was ready. He was particular as to moments, in punctuality, exacting punctuality from others, and not liking to be detected in the want of the duty he enforced.

As he looked out he saw the branches of the fence by the side of the wilderness displaced, and a man sprang into the open path.

"Who is that?" he said to his valet.

"The walk is like Mr. Rufus, sir."

Mr. Helmingham seated himself where he could watch the old moss-covered little gate which led from the wilderness, and was not disappointed in his expectations when a light figure passed through it, on her way to the house.

"They have been walking together and wish to conceal it," was his mental observation.

He was dressed hastily, and the luncheon bell summoned the stragglers before they were ready, consequently he was seated when Cora entered the room.

She thought she observed an expression of uneasiness in his face, and had made up her mind to conceal nothing with regard to her morning's occupation, should he cross-question her. She was too angry with Rufus to wish to hide it for his sake.

"Prudence to baseness verges still" in this young man, she thought.

There is nothing which nettles a woman so thoroughly as fancying that a man is ashamed of her, or of owning that he has sought her society.

"Good morning, sir," she said as cheerfully as she could; and as Mr. Helmingham only bowed in answer, she went on in desperation,—

"It is a very fine day."

He looked at her stealthily, and said,—

"Have you any particular motive, Miss Noble, in saying that it is a fine day?"

Cora repressed her desire to laugh at the supposition, and replied that she had not ventured

on an assertion of such vital importance without grounds, as she had tested the beauty of the morning by a long walk in the wilderness, and through the woods, with Mr. Rufus Helmingham.

The father looked up inquiringly.

“Your son was going into the woods to seek for ferns, which are to be placed in a large tub ornamented with branches split for the purpose. They are for Mrs. Helmingham’s room. He overtook me in the wilderness and asked me to go, and I quite enjoyed the little expedition.”

Mr. Helmingham’s face partially cleared.

“Did you arrange yesterday to go, or was it a sudden thought?”

“I do not know whether the walk after the ferns was premeditated. I had not heard of it till your son overtook me in the wilderness.”

Mr. Helmingham was relieved by Cora’s candour.

“There is no harm in her at present,” said he to himself. “In which wood did you seek your ferns?” he continued.

“We passed up an ascent planted with some

fine fir trees, and on the sandy acclivity we found, our fern specimens—very beautiful they looked, with their seed-bearing leaves, and buds like crumpled horns. Mr. Rufus Helmingham brought them in, I suppose, though he may have left them in the wilderness; but he said something I did not quite catch, and left me, returning to the house by another path."

"I could not have done that," said Mr. Helmingham, gallantly; "and I cannot say much for my son's taste 'to leave your fair side all unguarded, lady.' However, you must or ought to be hungry after such a ramble. Permit me to offer you," &c. &c.

When Rufus entered the room, his father was talking about marinated pilchards, and the proper way of preparing them; and Cora diverged to the description of a seine being drawn in by moonlight: of the fine, well-grown fishermen spread in a line along the extensive coast, dragging it on to the smooth, yellow sand; of the fish gleaming like silver as they "in wavering morris moved," still in the water, and making futile attempts to break through the cruel meshes.

She spoke of the blessings uttered by the poor and helpless at the result of the labours of their sons, which produced comfort for months to those who never even saw animal food in any other form. *They* knew nothing of marinated pilchards, for vinegar and spices were costly things ; but salt could be had for nothing, collected from the rocks when the summer sun had evaporated the moisture from the salt water.

If an old pan or large jar could be procured —or, better still, a tub—they were carefully salted and tightly pressed down ; if not, they were split and rubbed with salt, and dried on sticks hung round the outside and inside of their cottages.

Cora had seen a whole village population bringing their pennies and halfpennies for as many fish as they could carry, and those who had no money were welcome also. It always reminded Cora, in the abundant supply, of the miracle of the Apostles.

Rufus listened whilst he ate his luncheon, and from the direction the conversation had taken he believed it had travelled at a safe distance from ferns ; he was therefore somewhat dis-

composed when, as the door closed on Cora's retreating steps, his father said sharply,—

“ When you went to the fir plantation to dig ferns, may I ask why you went round by a route so circuitous as the wilderness? You will understand that it will not do for you to seek Miss Noble’s society. You watched her take that direction, and followed her to make her the companion of your walk. Remember, she is here as companion to your stepmother. That, if you marry her—‘ falling in love,’ as fools call it—you will have to found your own fortune, or live upon one hundred pounds per annum.”

“ Oh, do not trouble yourself, sir!—I never thought of *marrying* her.”

“ You will be disinherited if you do—that’s all! Nor is she to be thought of in any other relation. She is a gentleman’s daughter, and is under my charge.”

“ I shall respect your wishes, sir.”

“ Confound it!” said the young man, as he left the dining-room. “ The governor thinks of me as if I were his own age, instead of twenty-eight. He should not have brought that wax-work beauty here if he wishes to keep me from

temptation ; but I must go and present my gift to my lady mother.”

When Cora saw Mrs. Helmingham, she gave her an account of her morning walk, and of her vexation at the slight which she conceived Rufus had offered her.

She said that she had given Mr. Helmingham a full account of everything ; not choosing to be led into deception, or the semblance of it, by his son.

“ Poor girl !” said Mrs. Helmingham.

“ Why poor ?” asked Cora, flushing. She did not like the tone of pity in her friend’s voice.  
“ Did I not act rightly ?”

“ Oh, yes ; very rightly. But you have made an enemy of Rufus if he finds out—which he is sure to do—that you have told his father. And I don’t know how it is, but no one offends Rufus without getting into some trouble either present or future. Virtue, my dear, must be its own reward, for your candour will not bring you any other.”

“ Surely,” said Cora, “ Mr. Helmingham will believe me to be candid !”

Mrs. Helmingham gave a little short laugh.

"Mr. Helmingham never judges except by each separate act. He would argue thus :—Miss Noble is candid to-day because it suits her to be so ; but she is quite as likely to deceive me to-morrow."

Cora sighed.

"'Tis of no use to sigh. You must take the world as you find it."

Here they were interrupted by a tap at the door, and Rufus entered, followed by a couple of footmen bearing a large tub of ferns between them.

"Here, madam, is the result of a delightful walk with Miss Noble this fine summer morning."

Mrs. Helmingham gave a meaning glance at Cora, and whispered,—

"His father has told him."

Rufus, bending over the ferns, did not see or hear her.

"They look very luxuriant at present," continued he ; "but I fear that, like all ill-amalgamated creatures, one will destroy the other. Thus this prickly fern will grow only in dry places, as old John Packington, in his work published in the time of James I. assures us ; whilst the Osmund

or water fern, which I have placed in juxtaposition with it, will die in drought. Then, if the root of a reed be laid by the side of the fern root, Dioscorides relateth that each one will perish when the other is planted, so strong is the natural antipathy of instinct. I fear," continued Rufus, "that this will be the case with my brother and myself, he being accustomed to water and I to land."

He smiled sweetly as he said this, and "He cannot be angry or revengeful with such a countenance as that," was the thought passing through Cora's mind.

Mrs. Helmingham, however, knew him better; but she was an invalid, and allowed nothing unpleasant to dwell on her mind, lest her health might suffer consequently.

Rufus contrived to make himself well acquainted with the contents of his father's letters whenever he was at home.

His necessary absences at college made distressing chasms in his information, and it required all his skill, by leading conversations to the desired subjects, to find out what had been done in his absence.

Not that this desire for intelligence resulted from idle curiosity. The fine property which his father had so recently inherited was the object of his ambition.

He had as fair a chance as his eldest brother,—fairer. He believed himself to be cleverer. He always spent his vacations at home, whilst Edmond was absent three years at a stretch on distant stations.

How often he had read and re-read the copy of the precious will which had given this glorious wealth to his father! This testamentary document put forth that, whereas young men having the certainty of great possessions became idle and wilful and extravagant, besides being greatly tempted to anticipate the wealth which they desire to possess by sundry dealings with Jews, post-obits, &c., the testator had left the property in the power of the legatee to dispose of to whichever son he might deem most worthy, being advised and exhorted on no account to make his intentions known to anyone.

“Has he made a will? I trust in Heaven he has. If not, the landed estates—the property is all landed—will go to Edmond.”

Rufus burst into a cold perspiration at the idea. He had tried to find out from his stepmother if any lawyer from the neighbouring town had been lately at Abbotsbury. The shrewd lady laughed a disagreeable laugh, and said she did not know.

She guessed his motive for the question, and he saw at once that she had done so. She did not care about the will, having had a handsome jointure settled on her at her marriage.

There was a drawer amongst many in Mrs. Helmingham's escritoire, in which Rufus had detected, one day when his father opened it, the corner of some parchment document, which he believed to be his father's will. His curiosity and anxiety had been wrought to the highest pitch by this discovery. He tried all his own keys to Bramah locks, in vain—neither of them would turn it. Then he procured some wax, and took a careful impression of the wards of the lock as well as he could, and writing to the maker, he stated that he had unfortunately lost his key and wished to procure another on the model sent.

Messrs. Bramah were not in the habit, they

stated, curtly, of making keys under such circumstances, but they would send one of their workmen down to open the lock, and fit it with a key.

This arrangement would not suit Rufus, and no notice was taken of the proposition.

This sleepless young gentleman used to wait till all the household had retired for the night, and then in a pair of list slippers he would go with stealthy steps and "sit down before the place."

How carefully he examined the hard walnut wood of which the escritoire was constructed ! He looked at the back, at the sides, and even lifted it up, by great exertion of strength, to see if by cutting a piece out of the bottom he could withdraw the desired paper, and replace, after reading it. But detection would have been certain, and Rufus returned to his sleeping room, sighing deeply.

He was an early riser, and was in the habit of going to Mr. Helmingham's library, where the letters were placed by the valet for his master, who regarded his own comfort too much to disturb his digestion by their perusal before breakfast.

In the winter and spring weather the blazing fire was exceedingly useful to Rufus, as was a small bottle of gum which he carried in his pocket. By the aid of the bottle of water, which usually stood on the library table, he contrived to open such letters as were wafered—for adhesive covers were not known at the period when my story occurred—and with a little gum he contrived to refasten them. The sealed letters required a longer process, and were carried off to his room, where he generally contrived to make himself master of their contents, and replace them skilfully resealed, before his father came downstairs.

These proceedings were not dictated by idle curiosity. He wished to find out whether his father employed any man of business in London to transact his. Above all, he wanted to glean, if possible, what his father's intentions were with regard to the disposition of the property at his death.

Very much disturbed was Rufus one morning to find a letter couched in mysterious terms from a person with whose name and address Rufus was utterly unacquainted, advising Mr. Helmingham

to come to town immediately, as he had some important intelligence to communicate to him.

He turned the letter about in twenty different ways, in his perplexity. The postmark, Charing Cross, said nothing. He would contrive to be in the room when his father opened the letter, and try to find out from his countenance whether he anticipated pleasure or annoyance from the communication.

Rufus had so ill-used the paper, too, in his anxiety, that he was a little nervous lest his tricks might be detected.

He was late, and would scarcely have time to get into the room before his father reached it. When he went quickly through the ante-room of the library, he knew his father had just passed through it, by the scent of eau-de-cologne which proceeded from his handkerchief. Rufus turned pale, and held the letter within his pocket.

“Good morning, sir.”

“Good morning,” said his father, glaring at his son through his spectacles.

“Any news?” asked Rufus, making for the copy of the *Times* which laid amongst the letters.

"Take it," said Mr. Helmingham, without looking from the letter he had just opened. Rufus took it, and contrived to drop the purloined epistle into the place of the newspaper, and then sitting opposite his father he opened the broad sheet to its full extent, and seeming to read from it attentively, held himself in readiness to look up when his father's hand strayed to the suspicious letter.

At length Mr. Helmingham took it, and after a single glance at the writing, tore it open too eagerly to perceive that the seal had been tampered with.

He read it with a rising flush upon his countenance, but whether it arose from surprise, anger, or pleasure, Rufus could not decide.

"If he would but speak," he thought, "I could tell something from the tone of his voice."

"Funds very low, sir?"

"Indeed!" said his father, calmly. "It's lucky I am not obliged to sell out; but do not tell me the contents of the paper, or you will spoil my pleasure in reading it."

"Then I will go. No commands to your

gamekeeper, I suppose ? I am going to speak to him about a pointer puppy."

"No," said his father, drily, "except that you had better keep clear of the wilderness."

Rufus departed, out of countenance and baffled.

He was not surprised to learn in the course of the day from his stepmother, that his father was going to town on business the following morning. Rufus dutifully offered to attend his father if he wished for a companion, and Mr. Helmingham was rather pleased and touched by the proposition, which he thought originated in attachment to him personally, but Rufus would have been much in his father's way, and his services were civilly declined.

When Mr. Helmingham was safely out of the park, Rufus repaid himself for the restraint under which he had laboured for so many days, with regard to Miss Noble, and recommenced his tone of devotion towards her, whenever she was absent from Mrs. Helmingham.

She liked the change, but she could not forget that he had been afraid to appear to have walked with her that morning when they had fetched the

ferns, and she felt her preference strongly tinctured with contempt.

She did not believe that he owed her any grudge, as Mrs. Helmingham had suggested. Cora was not free from the self-confidence of youth, which chooses not to learn by the experience of others.

She liked her patroness exceedingly, and was grateful for her kindness, but in penetration and the power of reading characters accurately, she would yield to no one.

The conversation of Rufus was ever soothing and agreeable. His voice was melodious, and his sentences well turned. The young man might follow his own devices when his father was absent, and he ever attended Cora in and out of the house as her shadow. If Rufus had been asked what motive he had in doing this, he would have been unable to give any answer. The attraction was that of the senses, but after his father's warning he had no ultimate object beyond the pleasure of the passing hour.

I suppose there are few characters entirely consistent. Rufus was nearly so in his artfulness, and in the crookedness of his general policy, but

he began to have a warmer feeling towards Miss Noble than he had ever anticipated. There is something in the nature of love unselfish and ennobling, and had Rufus given this feeling a welcome in his breast, had he allowed its presence there to stir him up to studies which would have opened for him a career both honourable and lucrative, and therefore independent, he might have been a happier and better man. But the inheritance which was in his father's gift, was the one object of his life, to which every other was to be sacrificed.

"My brother's ship, the *Ariadne*, is to be paid off, and is just gone into Plymouth Dock. I suppose business may detain him for a week or so, and that he will then come to Abbotsbury."

"You must be eager to see him?" said Cora.

"Very," said Rufus, who had much rather that the *Ariadne* had foundered at sea.

Abbotsbury was approached on one side by a long double avenue of fine elms.

One summer evening, at the beginning of July, Cora and Rufus left the dining table, and strolled down the avenue towards the outer gate.

They were a handsome pair—singularly so. Miss Noble was of middle height, and faultless complexion. Her forehead was shaded by ringlets of light hair; her eyes were of soft grey colour; her nose straight and delicate, and her lips like the colour of the oleander. These, when she laughed, disclosed a row of pearly teeth. Her head was well set on her shoulders; her bosom full, and well formed; her ancles delicate, and her instep arched. She wore, on this occasion, a high dress of blue muslin, of a light tint, gathered together at her waist with a band, in the fashion then termed *à la vierge*, which showed to advantage her rounded form and delicate waist.

She walked along carelessly, not having accepted the offered arm of her companion, whilst he bent his handsome head in attention to her words whenever she spoke, and looked as if he loved her.

Love indeed would have suggested itself to anyone who saw the youthful pair in that balmy summer time, when the noble avenue in which they sauntered was in all its thick-leaved beauty.

They were observed from without the large gateway which terminated the walk.

Edmond, tired and travel-worn, had come to the neighbouring town ; and leaving his luggage at the hotel, had preferred to walk towards Abbotsbury, which he had never before visited. He looked at the noble mansion and broad acres by which it was surrounded with interest. They were his father's now ; they might possibly become his—his or his brother's. He tried to think of Rufus, and pictured to himself what “the man” might be of which “the child” he had known was “father.”

He remembered a beautiful boy with fair complexion and light curls, with the most innocent of expressions, but who always contrived to get the better of him and all his own cotemporaries in every childish bargain. The boys had agreed that Hel *secundus* was very sharp. He would cut himself some day, they prophesied, by his excessive sharpness. But he had not done so ; and Edmond had been conscious of a little envy of the younger brother, who by his cleverness had so frequently outwitted him and his companions.

As he contemplated the tranquil beauty of the scene, he saw Cora and Rufus coming up the avenue, and involuntarily he moved behind the stonework of the gateway, the better to observe them.

Edmond was naturally sallow, like Mr. Hellingham. He was a well-developed young man, strongly built, but wanting the grace of Rufus in his figure; whilst his face, which had never been beautiful, even in childhood, was deformed by a purple scar across the cheek, which he had received when junior lieutenant, in the act of boarding a French privateer.

The last specimens of the fair sex which he had seen were the Maltese ladies, with black eyes, flat breasts, narrow hips, and muddy complexions. No wonder that the sight of an English beauty so transcendant as Cora rivetted his gaze, till she turned towards her companion; and Edmond, following the direction of her eyes, recognised in the handsome young man bending towards her, the pretty brother of his boyhood.

A feeling of intense jealousy took possession of him.

The pace at which the young couple advanced gave him plenty of time for observation.

Presently Cora stooped as if to pick up something, but failed, and stooped again, whilst Rufus followed her, laughing.

Seemingly she had obtained what she sought, for she held it in the palm of her hand, inclined towards her bosom, and Rufus bent over her so nearly that Edmond could have boxed his ears with pleasure. She took but little notice of his brother, and looked anxiously at the high branches of the elm tree above them.

Rufus looked also, and made a gesture of dissent, and turned away.

"I see it all," said Edmond; "she has picked up a young bird and wants him to replace it in the nest. That boy never could climb well."

He watched them for a few minutes, during which time Rufus had walked a few paces back, leaving Cora standing with the bird in her hand.

Edmond opened the gate and came towards the girl, taking off his hat as he approached her, whilst she observed him with silent astonishment.

"Can I assist you in any way?" he said in a sweet, soft voice like that of Rufus; so like, that Cora started to hear such silvery tones from so rough an exterior. "You wish to have that young blackamoor bird put back in his nest? There is not much that I can do in the world, but I believe I am capable of that."

"Oh! I don't know," said Cora nervously; "you see the nest is very high, and if you were to fall it might kill you."

"My death would give pain to no one, and benefit to my brother, and would save my father any further perplexity."

"Pardon me; your death or injury would give me great distress, if either resulted from a good-natured wish to oblige me."

"Let us hope for the best," said he. "Will you pardon me if I take off my coat before you?"

He took his silk handkerchief from his pocket and threw his coat on the ground, and taking the young rook from Cora's hand, he slung it round his neck, so that the bird hung behind him, and began his arduous undertaking. Before he had attained half way to the nest, Cora called

to him to return. He looked down and smiled so kindly, that Cora wondered she had thought him plain.

"I am quite safe; do not be uneasy," he said.

At length he reached the nest, from which three little hungry beaks were protruded; and steadying himself with one hand, with the other he twisted the handkerchief round to the front, and seizing the bird, replaced it gently. Coming down was not so easy, as he had to feel for places for his footing through the thick ivy. At length he got near the ground, and dropped safely on it.

"I am really very much obliged to you. Here is your coat. I have been holding it, lest it should get damp and give you cold. You must be Captain Helmingham."

"How do you guess that fact?"

"Your voice is exactly like that of your brother Rufus in tone."

"Yes; there is no other resemblance, I am well aware," he said with a slight intonation of bitterness. "Rufus is an Adonis, if that be he who was speaking to you some minutes ago."

"Yes; Mr. Rufus Helmingham is considered exceedingly handsome," Cora replied, so quietly, that Edmond was almost reassured.

"Why has he walked off and left you alone?"

"I wanted him to do that which you have so good-naturedly accomplished; but as he said he could not without risking his neck, I asked him to fetch one of the stable-boys, who might have less regard for his life and more cupidity towards a shilling."

"I think you ought to give *me* the shilling; or I will let you off for sixpence, particularly if it be a crooked one. Sailors, you know, attach great value to such a token."

"If you compel me to own my poverty, I have neither about me; but I have both a shilling and a sixpence at the house, and you shall have your choice. If you be a modest gentleman you will choose the sixpence."

"I am not sure that such a preference would be proof of my modesty," said Edmund laughing, and showing a row of very white strong-looking teeth.

"I am going now to ask you to satisfy my curiosity about divers matters. In the first

place, I hope my father and stepmother are well?"

"Mr. Helmingham was quite well when he left Abbotsbury for London some days since. Mrs. Helmingham is as well as usual. Anything more?"

"Yes; I want to begin as with the catechism. What is your name?"

"N," replied Cora. "It says M or N, does it not? My name is Noble. I have heard that your Christian, or rather Pagan name is Edmond. Have you never felt inclined to vituperate your godfathers and godmothers?"

"After all, 'tis not so bad as Rufus; and then my namesake was Edmund Ironside, who shared the crown with Canute. Rufus is called after a Norman, quite a low fellow, after my pure blood. Have you not found out that my father is crazy on the subject of lineage? He firmly believes, I think, that his family was pre-Adamite; that the bones of our ancestors will be found cheek by jowl with those of the mammoth and other creatures of that monstrous world."

"Mr. Helmingham has not spoken to me on

the subject, but there is a long roll of parchment in the library, covered with coats of arms emblazoned. I suppose this genealogy is the result of his heraldic lore?"

"Yes, I believe that parchment, with its coat of arms, cost several hundred pounds. My father used to study it especially on wet Sundays in the morning, and in the afternoon of dry ones."

"And did not find it *dry*?"

"Don't make puns, Miss Noble. I suppose he did not find the study uninteresting, or, if he did, he continued it as a penance for his sins."

"And he found in this heraldic trophy names for his sons?"

"Yes; some Norman marauder, who came over with William the Conqueror, took one of the castles defended by a Saxon noble named Edmond, and after cutting off his head, he married his daughter, and reigned in his stead. Perhaps from an idea that, having deprived her of one Edmond, he was bound to supply her with another, he named his first-born son Edmond. The second was christened Rufus, in compliment to the young prince of that name.

My worthy father, finding these important facts fully set forth in the heraldic sheet, selected the names of Edmond and Rufus for those of his sons. But ‘talk of an angel, and you will hear the flutter of wings,’ and here comes the subject of our conversation.”

Rufus advanced with outstretched hand, and a charming smile of welcome on his face.

“ My dear fellow,” he said, shaking the hand of Rufus affectionately, “ I rejoice in your return. Your luggage has just arrived in the post-chaise ; and I heard from the post-boy that you had been too anxious to wait till his return from another job, and had taken the short cut to Abbotsbury. Then seeing an unexpected attendant at Miss Noble’s side, I came to give you a first greeting.”

Miss Noble separated herself from the young men, and returned to the house another way. She thought that the brothers must have much to confide to each other after so long a severance, and she sought Mrs. Helmingham’s room to inform her of the arrival of Captain Helmingham.

"So you have seen him? How do you like him? Very ugly—eh?"

"No, I should not call him ugly. Mr. Rufus Helmingham is beautiful, you know, and Captain Helmingham has no pretence to good looks; also the scar is very deforming—so purple and otherwise gaping—I should not have observed his face in any way. He seems to have a fine figure, and is very agile and very obliging."

And Cora told her friend how willingly he had ascended the tree to replace the young rook which had fallen from the nest.

After a short space, Captain Helmingham asked permission to visit his stepmother; and the same feeling of delicacy which had made Cora withdraw in the first interview between the brothers, induced her to leave the room when the young man entered it; and she found Rufus lying in wait for her, to find out what impression his brother had made on her mind.

She taunted him playfully with Captain Helmingham's proficiency in climbing, and found to her astonishment that he was touchy and irritable on the subject.

Cora looked at him with wonder. With all

the seeming devotion of his manner to her—a devotion so evident when alone with her that nine-tenths of womankind would have decided that he only required a word—a look—to encourage him to throw himself at her feet—Cora had never felt that it was anything but *seeming*.

Her instinct led her to detect the difference which there would be between real and counterfeit gold, though the true coin had never yet been offered for her acceptance.

After a moment's thought, she decided that he could not bear to be surpassed by his brother, even in a trivial accomplishment for which that brother's profession had particularly suited him.

It was well for Captain Helmingham's peace of mind that his father was absent on his return home. The young man had been accustomed to receive obedience and to exercise power on board his ship, and began various reformations in the household, in which he received no opposition from his stepmother. In fact, he asked permission so respectfully, that she, little accustomed to be consulted, was quite willing to grant

it, especially as the chief alteration was with reference to herself, and his determination to enjoy her society.

He had not been in the house an hour before he went off to the carpenter's yard with a plan he had himself designed for a chair, in which he intended, by the aid of one other person, to bring Mrs. Helmingham into the drawing-room.

His next idea was to have breakfast at nine o'clock in the dining-room with Rufus and Miss Noble, instead of the unsocial meal taken by each in solitude.

Cora asked Mrs. Helmingham's opinion; and as she did not object, she assented cheerfully.

On the day after his arrival, Mrs. Helmingham was carefully transported to the sofa in the drawing-room, to the relief of the invalid, who liked the fresh aspect of the room, whilst Edmond could scarcely refrain from executing a little dance of triumph at his success, and only checked himself in time from the fear of disturbing the patient.

"Do not order candles yet," said Mrs. Hel-

mingham. "Let us sit and inhale the summer scents through the open windows."

And Cora pushed back the massive curtains, and the clematis tossed her furry tassels of seed with her lingering blooms through the open window, and the jasmine clustered her star-like flowers amongst the china roses round the sill.

They were very tranquil and easy—the four people, met together in that soft July weather. Mrs. Helmingham had the consciousness of being well dressed, and of looking supremely handsome, notwithstanding her helplessness.

Cora was reminded in that twilight silence of her Margaret, probably inhaling the perfume of sweet peas, so carefully nurtured by her mother, and her heart softened with loving thoughts towards the absent ones.

Captain Helmingham enjoyed the scene of home and the perfumes of flowers, so different from the eternal smell of salt water; and had dim visions of a small home which was to be a cottage covered with flowers, and which was to contain a wife. At this thought his eyes sought the figure of Cora, who was sitting with her chin leaning on her hand, her elbow resting on the

window frame ; and her young face shaded by her fair hair, seemed to him as it were the face of an angel.

“But I should have no chance there,” he thought. “Rufus has forestalled me.”

And what were the meditations of Rufus ?

“This captain thinks he is to have everything his own way in the house—thinks himself master already, and has fallen in love with Waxwork. He shall have her or not, just as I choose ; and as for the inheritance—let him look sharp. My father said I should not have it if I married badly—Miss Noble, for instance—which implied that I should have it if I married well.”

In the meantime Edmond had risen softly and opened the piano.

“Do you perform on this instrument, Miss Noble ?”

“A little.”

“And—sing ?”

“A little less than little ; but I am considered rather good at an accompaniment ; if Mrs. Helmingham would like some music, and either of you gentlemen would favour us with a song, I shall be happy to play for you.”

"Let us hear you first, my dear," said Mrs. Helmingham; and Cora sang, simply and sweetly, the Hymn to the Virgin—"O Sanctissima! O Purissima!"

She looked round as she concluded, saying—  
"It sadly wants a second;" and recommencing it, Captain Helmingham took the second and Rufus the bass voice.

The effect was harmonious, and several songs followed with various successes—some called for practice; and amongst others, "O Happy Fair!" had the page turned down for repetition after breakfast on the following day.

Mrs. Helmingham did not miss her game of piquet that evening.

But for a jealous dread of the personal beauty of Rufus, Captain Helmingham would have been perfectly happy. He was very nearly so, from a slight mark of preference shewn him by Cora.

Both gentlemen were singing with her for the first time; but in her anxiety for the success of Edmond, she struck the notes he was to sing, and did not play the accompaniment set down for the performer on the piano.

Rufus detected it at once, but, confident in his own knowledge of music and power of voice, he disdained to notice it, and was too proud to admit that the preference was intentional.

"Probably she thought Edmond would not sing in tune unless the voice was guided by the identical sound."

It was exceedingly intoxicating to Cora to find herself the object of attention to two gentlemen, as she had never before received any marks of preference.

When the singing lesson was concluded on the following day, Edmond asked Cora, when Rufus had left the room, if she could ride on horseback, and finding that she had never attempted it, he was seized with a desire to teach her.

It is strange that sailors should all be possessed by a mania for riding—an accomplishment in which they are rarely proficients, unless they have been constantly exercised on the back of their ponies up to the time of their entering the navy. Thus their daring in horsemanship excites the admiration of the hunting fields in which they appear; whilst a smile is the general meed of their want of judgment in riding.

Edmond knew not much of horsemanship, but he had unbounded confidence in himself and his animal, whatever it might be which fell to his lot. He knew there were several horses in the stable, and that one had once carried a lady. This being ascertained, he went to his step-mother, and begged for the loan of her habit for Miss Noble's first essay in horsemanship.

Mrs. Helmingham had become timid for others as well as herself since her seizure.

"My dear Edmond, is it not rather hazardous? Pray consider; an accident, you know, would be so very shocking."

"No fear, madam."

"As for the habit," with a sigh, "Miss Noble is very welcome to it. I shall never ride again, I suppose, though I think I am a little stronger on that side than I was."

"If you ride—and glad beyond expression should I be to see you in your old place, with your graceful seat upon your horse,—when that happy day comes, you shall have a habit from town, made by the most fashionable tailor in the newest of fashions."

"Agreed," said the lady, somewhat cheered

by the prospect opened to her, and by the conviction that Edmond thought such a resurrection possible. "If you will ring, I will order my maid to look out the habit for Miss Noble. My little whip is on the stand in the hall."

"The hat, too?"

"Yes; unless Miss Noble's own hat suits her better. She's perfectly welcome to mine."

Edmond considered himself as a very successful ambassador when this was accomplished. He breakfasted alone with Cora on the following morning, and observed with pleasure how the close-fitting dress became the fine proportions of her figure.

They were going to start immediately after breakfast, to take advantage of the coolness of the morning, and also of the hours when Cora was not kept in attendance on Mrs. Helmingham.

Rufus—not having the vivid interest of reading his father's letters, which he had when Mr. Helmingham was at home—did not trouble himself to come down to breakfast. He felt convinced that Cora preferred him to his brother, and believed that he could whistle her back whenever he chose.

"So beautiful a face was not given to me for nothing," he thought; and then he smiled at the thought of the gaping scar in Edmond's cheek.

Edmond gave himself up to the agonies and delights of a first love; yet so conscious was he of his personal defects, as compared with Rufus, that he constantly repressed the expression of his sentiments, and strove to stifle their very existence.

"He knew her first," he would repeat. "They *must* have become attached to each other. I should be a dishonourable scoundrel to try to dispossess my brother of the prize he had so fair a chance of winning. What a happy fellow he must be! so beautiful in his person—so winning in his manner!"

He was impatient to place Cora on her horse, and in his eager carefulness he went round to the stable to see the animal saddled himself, and bridled both with a curb and a snaffle.

"Excuse me, sir," said the groom, "but you had better take the young lady through the byelanes, which are unfrequented, and not across the park, for the horses are wonderful fresh."

Cora had a lesson in straightening her knee and allowing herself to be lifted into her saddle. Her heart beat with painful rapidity, and her face lost some of its beauty in becoming deadly in colour when she found herself at an elevation so unusual.

Then Edmond gathered the reins and put them into her hand, and thought she looked very lovely on horseback, all the more from the appearance of timidity and irresolution in her aspect. He held a leading-rein, and they went on their way through the hedges odorous with woodbine and wild laurel, and intersected with lanceolated rays of sunshine darting across the deep glooms and winding mossy ways.

As Cora gained courage in her unusual position she began to recover her colour, to look about her, and to enjoy herself; but every unexpected movement of her horse brought up an appealing expression on her face, directed to her companion, who loved her the more for the helplessness which trusted to his protection from harm.

He was constantly jumping off his horse to ask if her stirrup could be made to suit her

better—to see if the saddle was not slipping, or the reins turning into tinder in her hands, or anything equally probable.

He did not permit her to go out of a walk. Trotting was a grave piece of business that might be learnt at some future time. At present what could be more delightful than matters as they then stood? The lovely weather, the cool shadows of the lanes, the flickering lights that played through the acacia leaves on the dancing ringlets which gleamed like threads of gold under Cora's black hat, presented objects of attraction to the sailor more valuable from their rarity.

Summer foliage, horses, and beautiful equerrians were not to be had on board the *Ariadne*; and though the trim vessels and the salt sea breezes, with the life of excitement which they recalled, were dear to the memory of the captain, he enjoyed the contrast presented by present objects. Besides, he loved for the first time—loved with all the reverence of youth, and with the fiery passion of manhood; and the object of his idolatry was by his side, dearer and more prized in her shrinking timidity than the most

practised horsewoman would have been who needed no assistance.

They lingered long, till it was nearly one o'clock, and then they rode down the long avenue, through the whole of which they were visible from the window of the room where Rufus was sitting.

His brow darkened as he looked at his elder brother, and saw the eagerness of his manner towards Cora—saw how near to her he rode, and in what fervent talk his head bent towards her.

As he looked, and got over the first gulp of bitter feeling at the sight of Edmond's happiness, a satisfied smile gathered on his face.

"He shall marry her," he thought; "his father would never forgive him, and I shall have the inheritance. I need not scheme for this, the fool is going to the devil as fast as he can. Yet she is a lovely girl, and I think she likes *me*. It is hard that a woman so beautiful should be thrown away on such an ugly fellow. Poor, too: his profession and a hundred a-year to live on—ha! ha!"

It is worthy of observation that every man

believes that every woman likes him, or would like him if he gave her an opportunity, unless she gives some unmistakable proofs of dislike to him.

When we first discovered this fact, we thought it arose from some idiosyncrasy in the individual ; but finding in a long experience that the feeling was universal, we succumbed to the conviction that it had been a hitherto unobserved phase in human nature ; or, if observed, unrecorded.

Cora might have loved Rufus could she have trusted that there was real warmth concealed under the cold glitter of his phrases. She might have loved him but for his desertion of her that day in the wilderness ; an act which seemed to her so pitiful and cowardly.

When Edmond guided her horse through the entrance-gate at the head of the avenue, Cora's heart bounded with the conviction of the nobleness of his character. *He* cared not for concealment : *he* defied observation. All the household might see him shortening the leading-rein, that he might bend towards her, and continue his eager talk.

Rufus was determined to say nothing to his

stepmother on the subject: he suspected the truth, which was that Mrs. Helmingham was more taken by his brother's bluntness than by his own polish.

"She will warn Edmond if she suspects anything," he thought.

It was not likely that a woman so shrewd as Mrs. Helmingham—whose mind yearned for objects of interest—should not have felt interested in this question.

Edmond was as transparent as glass, and as innocent as a child, of the revelations he made of his devotion to Cora. His stepmother detained him one day when he was leaving the room with Cora.

"Edmond, I want you for a few minutes."

He came back, and seated himself tenderly by her side.

"What can I do for you, my dear stepmother?"

"You can do nothing for me, my dear; but I can say something for your good. Mothers and friends always talk thus when they are going to be disagreeable; but you will pardon me for the intention's sake. You love Miss Noble?"

"I do!" he answered fervently and impressively.

"It must not be, Edmond."

"For what reason?" he replied, in a constrained voice. "Do you think she can never love such an ugly fellow as I am?"

"Don't be foolish, you are a fine-looking young man, whom any woman might be proud to marry."

"But not fond enough to love."

"Pray do not be so captious, Edmond. What I do mean is that Cora Noble is very poor, and has no relations who have the power of enriching her. You know that your father may leave you all this rich inheritance, or he may cut you off with one hundred a year. Do not comit yourself to this girl. She is very nice, but I never saw a woman yet who was worth the sacrifice of thirty thousand a year."

"I am grateful to you, my dear madam, but I think a man who is captain of his own ship can work it better in a difficulty than any one else. Miss Noble is poor now; if she marry me she will be the wife of a poor man, but of one whose heart is worth acceptance, I flatter myself. My father

has not long possessed this fine property, long may he live to enjoy it, and if at his death he likes to leave it to Rufus I shall not grudge my brother the preference. I disdain to wait for happiness till my father's decease."

"At any event, my dear romantic son, *wait*. Now promise me that you will not commit yourself at present. You know nothing of Miss Noble but that she is beautiful, and agreeable, and poor. She may be ill-tempered, designing, covetous, or extravagant. A man about to take a leap for life, should look well at the soil on which he is to alight."

"You are right, madam, I will be more careful. I thank you for your caution, not that I believe it likely that she should have the ill qualities you attribute to her as possible defects; but I do doubt the power of loving one whose personal defects must be so frightfully prominent when seen in opposition with the beauty of his brother."

Cora entered the room at this moment, and was astonished at the flush on Mrs. Helmingham's usually colourless face, and at the settled look of gloom on that of Edmond. The trifling observation she was about to make when she entered

the room died on her lips, and she felt a conviction that Mrs. Helmingham and Edmond had both been speaking of her disparagingly. The conviction deepened when, as days went on, Edmond checked himself frequently when in the flow of animated conversation with her, conversation which ever seemed trembling on the brink of an avowal of love on his part. But intense passion is not long concealed from any one interested in the discovery of its existence. The sparks will scintillate, however carefully the centre of the fire may be shadowed from view. Cora knew that Edmond loved her, and she gave the whole of her innocent heart to him in return, without waiting for verbal or written confession to confirm it.

The evening passed pleasantly with music, in which both brothers joined in song. Rufus was too intent on the carrying out his scheme to feel dull, even in the presence of the lovers.

Mrs. Helmingham had done, she thought, more than a stepmother's duty in the warning she had given Edmond. It was no affair of hers, though she liked her elder stepson well enough to wish to save him from an imprudent marriage.

Mr. Helmingham was still detained in London, and did not hold out any promise of a speedy return.

"If all goes smoothly I shall get them married before he comes back," thought Rufus, yet the thought of his success tortured him. He loved her also after his own sensual fashion, and sometimes betrayed his feelings in a manner which astonished and alarmed the innocent object of them.

Sometimes when they were alone he would take her hand and grasp it fiercely, and then flinging it away, would leave her abruptly : when he returned to the room his face was dressed in the most placid of smiles, and gave no indication of the storm which had raged in his breast.

One evening when Mrs. Helmingham was about to be transported to the drawing-room, Edmond was sent for to the stable to see a horse which had been taken ill. In conversation with Mrs. Helmingham, Cora mentioned that she had found in one of the upper rooms, at the end of a long corridor, an apartment containing a number of music books, and said that she had opened one and found that it contained some music of which

Captain Helmingham had been speaking in commendation on the previous evening. Mrs. Helmingham expressed a wish to see the book, and hear some of the pieces played.

"I will send the servant," she said.

"He will not know which book to bring, and there are so many," said Cora. "I will go myself." And she went, lighting a candle first, though it was twilight, and lamps had not been brought to the room.

It was dark on the stairs and corridors, and the passage at the top of the house was separated from the staircase by a heavy oak door. She pushed this open with difficulty, and went on to the room containing the music. That part of the house was untenanted, and she felt a little tremor at the notion that she was all alone, and so far from a living creature. As she opened the door, the draught of wind blowing through a broken pane in the window, blew out her candle. She went in and took the book, the position of which she remembered, and returned along the corridor, but found herself in perfect darkness. Moving step by step, with the music under one arm and the other extended to feel her way,

she found herself suddenly clasped by powerful arms, and her face and neck covered with hot kisses. She dropped the book, and, screaming dismally, strove to disengage herself from the forced embrace.

The man spoke not a word in answer to her entreaties for freedom, and seemed but little disturbed by her piteous cries, which he probably knew could not be heard.

In the effort to free herself, Cora's hand touched the wall, and she felt the wire of a bell ; and twisting her fingers in it, she rang violently.

She was released directly from the grasp of her assailant, and fell breathless and trembling against the wainscot. She dared not move, lest she should encounter her enemy again. She thought she would crawl stealthily back to the music-room, and try to fasten herself inside it.

She listened, and could hear nothing; but before she had courage to carry out her intention, she saw the glimmer of lights, and heard the murmur of voices in the distance, and a troop of servants came up, too much oppressed by super-

natural fears to answer the bell except in a crowd, when it rang from such a locality.

When they found Cora pale and breathless, leaning against the wainscot, they were sure she had *seen* something uncanny, and lighted her downstairs with mingled feelings of awe and commiseration.

When Cora reached the drawing-room, Mrs. Helmingham was already established on her sofa, and Rufus reading to her "The Pleasures of Hope" with the most perfect placidity of voice and manner.

The footman, who had been one of those who answered Cora's summons, placed the music-book on the piano.

"You have been a long time looking for it, Cora," said Mrs. Helmingham, gently.

"No, madam; I found it easily, but the candle blew out, and I was frightened—and—and lost my way, and found a bell-wire."

"And saw a ghost, I should think," said Mrs. Helmingham, smiling.

"You seem agitated," said Rufus's silver tones. "I fear your voice will not be very steady this evening."

"It could not have been he," she thought.  
"He looks as if he had been here this half hour past."

Could it have been Captain Helmingham? He came in with a grave, flushed face, on which anxiety for the fate of a valuable horse was evident. He looked as if he had not a thought unconnected by the stable he had just left, and constantly referred to his watch, to gather from its index how long it would be before the veterinary surgeon could arrive.

The insult had not come from Edmond, she was sure.

Cora felt it to be impossible to explain her distress till she was alone with Mrs. Helmingham. She felt too nervous to sing, lest she should begin to weep, and Rufus gallantly challenged his stepmother to a game of piquet.

Captain Helmingham was reading "White's Farriery," and striving to arrive at the nature of his horse's attack, and Miss Noble seated herself on a hassock by the side of Mrs. Helmingham's sofa.

Presently that lady exclaimed,—

"Why, Cora, what an extraordinary mark

you have on your shoulder ! Blue and red, the blood starting under the skin, and the indication of two teeth, or what resembles their impression ! My dear, you must have encountered, not a ghost, but a vampire !”

Cora’s face, before so colourless, now flushed painfully up to the roots of her hair, and over her throat and bosom. Innocent as infancy, her appearance bore the marks of guilt. She said nothing ; and Captain Helmingham looked off his book in astonishment and displeasure, though he could scarcely tell wherefore.

Rufus said, in his sweetest tones,—

“ Dear me ! how odd !”

Edmond felt that there was some secret from which he was shut out, and grew sullen and reserved.

When Mrs. Helmingham retired for the night, Cora followed her to her bedroom, and begged, in a whisper, that she would dismiss her maid, and grant her a few moments’ conversation.

When they were alone, Cora told the circumstances which had so much distressed her.

“ Who could it have been ?” was the question uttered by both ladies, simultaneously.

"It could not have been Edmond," said Mrs. Helmingham: "and I do not believe that Rufus left the room for an instant."

"I fancied," said Cora, hesitatingly, "that he left the room just before I did, and when I said I would fetch the book."

Mrs. Helmingham thought Cora was mistaken. She confessed that lying in the twilight and silence, she might have dozed a little; but her impression was that Rufus was seated in the room the whole time, till he awoke his step-mother, and prepared, with the assistance of the footman, to carry her down.

"'Tis a dreadful thing to think of, my dear child," said the lady; "but I suspect that one of the men-servants, hearing a step and seeing a light upstairs, followed, with the idea of frightening one of the maids—not having an idea that you would go up at this time of the night. It is very disagreeable, no doubt, to be kissed against one's will by a gentleman, but the degradation of a plebeian touch 'makes the gorge rise.' It seems to me that we had better say nothing about it. 'Tis a blessing that the young men know nothing about it. It seems a de-

gradation that it should have occurred. I dare say the man was frightened enough when he found he had attacked the wrong person, and will gladly join his fellow-servants in attributing your terror to some supernatural agent. I must keep you nearer myself in the twilight evenings," she continued.

Drawing Cora towards her, and kissing her kindly on the forehead, she dismissed her to bed.

Cora fancied Edmond had looked coldly on her that evening—suspiciously, and she felt aggrieved. It was wretched enough to have been so grossly insulted, without having the man she loved so grim and surly in aspect.

Love, however determined on secrecy, is apt to break out and betray itself unawares; to make itself known by a thousand little inadvertencies and absurdities in the conduct of the victim, the result of the tenderness which governs his actions. These Cora had been wont to observe in Edmond, but this night she had missed them. They did not appear—she could scarcely believe they had existed: she must have been walking in a vain shadow, and flattering

herself in vain. She must have been a fool to think he ever had cared for her ; and she wept that her illusion was dispelled, and looked out at the sky, to try to guess whether the weather would be fine enough for her riding-lesson to-morrow—she supposed Captain Helmingham would not deprive her of that : but the sky was gloomy, unillumined by moon or stars ; and Cora laid her head on her pillow and sobbed herself to sleep.

The next day there was soft continuous rain, which showed itself in a hopeless manner against the dark masses of clustered elms in the park.

That portion of the park which had been divided from the deer looked dreary with its haycocks sunk down to half the size of the preceding day.

The little army of haymakers, who had come in the hope of the weather clearing, went back disconsolately to their homes—that is to say, the women did : the men adjourned to the public-houses in the village.

Cora entered the breakfast-room a little before nine o'clock, and directly the clock struck,

Captain Helmingham, with sailor-like punctuality, entered the room also.

Cora looked up at him anxiously, in the hope of a kindly glance, those glances which she had learnt to watch for and to love ; but he bowed stiffly, without offering his hand, and took up his letters ; then, seeing her sitting without any to occupy her, he opened the daily paper and presented it to her.

People who sit at the breakfast-table and see others with a handful of greetings from other hearths, having none themselves, generally feel depressed and shut out from sympathy, and strive to console themselves by the thought that they shall not have the trouble of answering any ; which is about tantamount to a starving man consoling himself for want of bread by the thought that he should not have to pay for any.

Cora looked at those in Edmond's hand, and wondered if there were any in female caligraphy—or writings by courtesy called caligraphic—but she could not satisfy herself. Edmond scarcely looked at them : those he did see conveyed no impression to his mind. He could not bear to

be away from Cora, but he wished her to be as miserable as his own suspicions had made himself.

He had seen the wistful look she gave him as he entered, and was glad to think that she was disappointed at his non-response.

He opened the newspaper, and offered it to Cora—who felt inclined to cry, and, receiving it in silence, began to read the advertisement sheet.

He watched her without speaking, as she read, and presently saw tears falling on her cheeks.

“ You seem highly interested in your studies, Miss Noble ; pray, do you often weep over the *Times*’ advertisements ? ”

This was very womanly and spiteful in Captain Helmingham, for he fully believed that his cruelty had made Cora cry ; but she wiped her eyes quietly, and said,—

“ Yes.”

“ Indeed ! ” incredulously.

“ Yes ; if anyone reads some of the advertisements, and pictures to oneself the agony of the sick heart, sick with suspense and watching for

the dear ones "missing," if we think of the suffering endured before the public papers are called on to convey an appeal to the absent one, who can be reached in no other way, and may never be reached even thus; to whom the attempt is like the rocket flying at hazard through the darkness in the direction of a foundering vessel, which may never reach its destination; —we may well weep those helpless tears which are the involuntary tribute to the woe we can never reach nor rectify. There were a succession of advertisements addressed some time since to a girl called Louisa, by her mother. First came the frequently repeated notice of the young lady "missing," and an account of her person; young and seemingly very beautiful, judging by her description. Then an entreaty that she would leave the abandoned man for whom she had deserted her lonely mother. After some weeks came the saddest appeal of all. The writer seemed crushed by the blow dealt by the hand of her child, but she still told her that however lost or degraded, her mother's arms would shelter her.

"Poor mother! I hope she is dead; nothing

but death could wipe out such disgrace, or arrest tears shed for such a cause."

Edmond said, drily, that "he had no sympathy with runaway ladies, nor with sentimental mothers."

"Think then of a subject that may touch you more nearly, Captain Helmingham. What can be more pathetic than the curt announcement that a certain vessel sailed from port on such a day, and had never arrived at her destination? A tragedy is contained in a line and a half. I can fancy the agony of the sinking crew must be aggravated by the conviction that no tongue could tell the secret of their fate to those whose lives are wearing away on shore in the alternations of hope and despair, with regard to their welfare. If you ever should unfortunately be in a position so lamentable, you will think the tears that sprung to the eyes of the reader, from the contemplation of such a catastrophe, are not those of maudlin sentimentality."

"You are quite eloquent this morning, Miss Noble."

"You say nothing, and sneer at me when I read the paper you gave me as a substitute for

your conversation ; I am quite willing to be silent," and she sat without speaking, and Edmond looking at her through the steam made by the hissing urn, thought she was very lovely, and forgot nearly his suspicions of the previous night.

"I hope your poor horse is better," said Cora, at length.

"Yes, I thank you, out of danger, I trust. His illness spoilt my evening yesterday. I hope we may have some music to-night."

The sullenness seemed passing away, Cora was happy to observe ; but she could not but perceive that there were faults in his temper, which might shipwreck the happiness of any one dependent on him to procure and share it.

With the exception of this indication of jealousy and suspicion which seemed now lulled to sleep in the memory of Edmond, his manner to Cora was full of devotion as ever. The expression of his ardour trembled on his lips, and seemed ever ready to escape from them. He was ever on the watch for her step, for the tones of her voice, for the glance of her eyes, and every indication of attachment was watched and commented on by Rufus, sometimes with

bitter laughter, and sometimes with inward curses.

Some few mornings subsequent to this conversation, the brow of Edmond grew clouded as he read his letters, and he looked anxiously for a moment at Cora. No one was present but the footman, who had brought them, and when he had left the room, Captain Helmingham asked Cora if she would walk with him that morning, instead of riding, as her horse had thrown a shoe.

She assented willingly.

“I must go first to the stable, and I will meet you at the seat in the wilderness, at eleven o’clock precisely,” said the punctual sailor.

The footman had lingered, listened, heard the assignation as he was proceeding to carry the rest of the letters to the sleeping room of Rufus.

“Do you know whether Captain Helmingham is going to ride this morning?” said that young man to the servant.

“No, sir; the captain can’t be going to ride, for I heard him ask Miss Noble to meet him at the seat in the wilderness at eleven o’clock precisely.”

“And these are all the letters for me?”

“Yes, sir.”

“That will do; you may go.”

And Rufus dressed himself in haste.

## CHAPTER VI.

She came through the mead with a rose in her hair ;  
Her step was elastic, though pensive her air ;  
She paused not to list to the nightingale's note,  
Nor the musical reed of the shepherd remote,  
But she hurried along, with a flush in her face,  
For her lover was first at the lone trysting-place.

WHEN Cora reached the trysting place, her heart was beating faster than usual, for she felt that her lover was about to make some avowal of his attachment, and to ask for its return.

She had no doubt of her own sentiment. She had never loved before—had never been solicited to bestow her affection ; yet she felt that Captain Helmingham was dearer than her own life to her —dearer than her mother and Margaret, whom she had loved so long.

The seat was semi-circular, and boarded round, except at the opening, and being placed on the highest part of the wilderness, it commanded in front a cultivated view of park and glebe, while

it was surrounded at the back with high trees and thick underwood.

Captain Helmingham was already there, looking eagerly along the path through which he expected her to arrive, with his watch in his hand.

"Pretty well for a lady," he said, placing her by his side, after carefully dusting the seat.

They were silent for a few moments, for Cora was breathless from the beating of her heart, and Edmond was seized with a sudden dread that she should refuse him, on seeing in her bosom a blossom of the gardenia which Rufus had presented to her on the preceding day as they went down to dinner.

This flower was to him what Mordecai the Jew was, sitting at the king's gate, to Haman his enemy.

The blossom, which mingled in his mind the idea of Rufus with that of the woman he wished to make his wife, chilled his heart and chained his tongue.

His eyes were rivetted on it. Those of Cora were cast down to the earth; and soon they found something there to occupy them intently.

An adder of unusual size and vigour was advancing towards the feet of Edmond, from under the seat which they occupied.

Cora knew the difference between its appearance and that of the common green snake, and felt sure that Edmond, if he saw, would attack it unguardedly, and get bitten. With a very white face, she stooped suddenly and grasped the creature round the neck, and flung him into the thicket.

Edmond saw the act, which was sudden as thought—saw the viper coil itself round the delicate arm of the girl he loved, and then she was free from it.

"Are you hurt?—are you sure you are not bitten? Oh! how could you do such an imprudent act? Why not have told *me*?"

Cora did not answer for a few seconds, she was trembling too much. Then she said, in broken words,—

"Your life is so valuable."

"And is not yours, Cora? It will depend on you whether my life is to be valuable to me or not. Look you! I have a letter to-day which calls me to London—to the Admiralty. It is

likely that I may be appointed to another ship very shortly."

He looked at Cora, and saw tears on her face.

"Cora, I have little to offer you but a loving heart. I have no personal attractions, such as the beauty and grace with which my brother Rufus is endowed ; but in the power of loving, I defy any one to exceed me. I shall never be a rich man, though I have been fortunate hitherto in prize money, and hope to obtain more. How glad should I be to lay my spoils at your feet ! I expect nothing from my father at his death ; he would never sanction my marriage with anything but rank or wealth. I have a keen appreciation of the value of these, but I hold them as nothing in comparison with the worth of 'a virtuous woman, whose price is above rubies.'"

"It seems, then," said Cora, "that if you marry me you will be doing yourself great injustice, and cutting yourself off from an inheritance, which appears properly to belong by right to the elder brother."

"All for love, and the world well lost," said the sailor, smiling. "But do you think you

could love me, Cora ?" and he passed his arm round her waist, and drew her towards him, placing one hand under her chin, and pressing his lips to the rosy mouth, which had never before felt an impression so ardent. She made but a feeble resistance, and the silence told of the caress given and received.

" What is that ?" said Cora, starting from her seat, and disengaging herself.

" I heard nothing."

" I am sure I heard a sound like —— "

" Well ! pretty one ! like a bird singing to its mate."

" No, like a suppressed groan."

Edmond smiled, and embraced her again. " The old trees groan and shriek sometimes, as if they had Ariels shut up inside them. But, O my Miranda ! tell me when you will marry me ? It must be before I sail, if I am appointed to this ship. Think how happy it would make me to know that I had one at home who would pray for my safety, and for our reunion ; that I had a treasure on shore, a priceless treasure awaiting my return, the knowledge of which would people my solitary

watches on deck with images of household warmth and social ties. I have been happier, far happier, and more utterly miserable, since I knew you, than I ever was before."

"I can understand both feelings," said Cora, blushing, "at least," and her colour deepened, "I have felt both since I have been here; but I do not understand why you should have been miserable, nor why you were so very cold and stern in your manner to me."

This was a puzzling proposition, for Edmond was ashamed of his suspicions with respect to the affair of the corridor, and so he answered only in generalities.

"I am such an ugly fellow, and I fancied that one so beautiful as yourself, would be captivated by the superior personal attractions of my brother Rufus."

"Foolish man!" murmured Cora.

The caress was renewed, and some movement in the shrubs scared a bird from the branches at the back of the summer-house.

"My idea is, my Cora, to wait on my father in town, if he does not return immediately, and ask his consent to our union."

"Oh! dear!" cried Cora, "he will be so angry, I quite dread it. He is sure to refuse."

"Probably, but I have arrived at years of discretion, being thirty, and I think I have a right to decide on the course of life most conducive to my own happiness."

"O don't offend him!"

"You mean, do not marry you?"

"Better wait; perhaps he might relent and withdraw his opposition; besides," continued the girl, hesitating, "I should not like to marry without the consent of my only parent, and I think she would withhold it unless she were sure that your father was not adverse to your marriage with me."

Edmond sighed. "Little one!" he said at length, "my profession renders my life a very uncertain one. There are storms to be encountered on the ocean, and enemies also. If I were at rest at the bottom of the sea my widow would have a small pension from Government, and would, I think, have claims on the tenderness of my father, and my brother Rufus, which they would not, I believe, disregard."

The images thus conjured by Edmond were not cheering, and she wept at the thought of losing one so lately found, but who loved her as she had never been loved before.

“ We will think more of this before we decide, my darling ! It shall be happiness enough for me this day to have the conviction that you love me, and your promise to become my wife.”

He took from his pocket a small pair of scissors, and cut off a curl from the back of her head. This he placed in the corner of a letter, and laid it on his breast.

“ There it shall stay till the beautiful head from which it was separated takes its place,” he said, kissing her again.

“ Hark ! there is the luncheon bell !” said Cora : “ your brother is always vexed when we are not there punctually.”

“ You mean, when *you* are not there punctually, for I am always ready to the moment.”

They walked towards home swiftly, but found on their reaching the dining-room that they had disquieted themselves in vain, for Rufus did not arrive till some little time after. When he did appear his cheek had a long scratch on it.

"Some one has scratched your face, Mr. Rufus," said Cora.

"Not some one—something—the branch of a tree caught my cheek, as I stooped to pick up a snare; really the gamekeeper is not half sharp enough."

"Where was it set?" said Edmond. And Rufus named a plantation more than a mile from the wilderness.

Rufus remained in the dining-room, looking out on the extent of park, glorious in the mid-day sunshine, which marked with deep shadows the clustering clumps of oak and elm trees.

These shadows were tenanted by groups of deer, reposing on the soft, short grass, and hidden from the summer heat by the overspreading branches.

Two specks of white marked where the swans moved slowly over the bosom of the ample lake, which was fringed by yellow and purple irides; and a soft mist rising from the water, hung over it like a floating veil.

Rufus gazed, and was comforted.

"Let him take that painted beauty—that animated wax-work doll. *This* shall be mine—

consolation enough for the loss of half the feminine creation.” Then he thought of the beauty he disparaged, and yearned for the love she had given his brother. “Yes; he shall marry her—curse him! He shall marry her, and lose the estates. He will go to sea—a bread-winner for his penniless bride; and then—why then—my turn may come with the lady;” and he laughed, believing all women might be won.

## CHAPTER VII.

O ye tough rogue! what troubles have I trotted through!

What fears and frights! Every poor mouse a monster, That I heard stir; and every stick I trod on, A sharp sting to my conscience.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

CORA did not relax her attention to Mrs. Helmingham's comfort; and as both the young men were eager to please their stepmother, the time passed smoothly with that lady; and like a happy dream to the lovers, who, blest in the consciousness of their avowed affection, showed fewer outward signs of its existence.

Rufus alone was torn by divers tortures. He saw the woman he loved the affianced wife of his brother, and was glad that it should be so for his own advantage. But as he thought of her, his imagination painted to his appetite the kisses Edmond had impressed on her lips; when the

hungry anguish of his heart sent a half-uttered groan from his lips. Then he clenched his hands and ground his teeth, and declared to himself that Edmond should never possess such a creature.

If it be true as stated by a modern writer that damnation, which orthodox views put off to a future world, is a present thing ; that it is now men are damned ; it is now men are in hell ; and that damnation is the necessary consequence of our own evil passions in this world—Rufus's agonies of mind might have confirmed the theory.

Two letters producing important effects on the little party at Abbotsbury arrived the following morning. One was from Mr. Helmingham, announcing his immediate return home, addressed to his wife. The other, blotted and nearly illegible from tears, was addressed by Margaret to Cora, telling her of her mother's dangerous illness, and entreating her to return immediately.

Cora went weeping to ask for an interview with Mrs. Helmingham, and to beg permission to return home.

Mrs. Helmingham looked at her with a mixture

of kindness and perplexity ; saying, “Yes,” however, but thinking of the inconvenience of sending a servant the whole way, when his services would be required at home by reason of his master’s return.

“ I was thinking how to get you down safely,” said the lady at length.

“ If,” said Cora, blushing, “ you would kindly let a servant attend me through London, I should do very well when once placed in the west country mail coach.”

This was assented to, and Cora began her preparations for her sorrowful journey.

“ I shall not know what to do without you, Cora,” said her kind patroness. “ I hope you will return to me so soon as Mrs. Noble is out of danger. I will not imagine that this will not be the case ; but in all circumstances, my dear child, rely on me as on a sincere friend;” and Cora wept and thanked her.

In the course of the morning Edmond announced to Mrs. Helmingham, that as business obliged him to be in London for a few days, he might as well spare his stepmother the loss of her servant’s attendance, as he could him-

self put Miss Noble into the west country coach.

Mrs. Helmingham looked at him meaningfully.

"Poor fellow!" she said, "very far gone."

"Yes," he replied; "I am proud that it is so, and I mean to ask my father's consent so soon as I have an opportunity of speaking to him."

"Better consider about it," she said.

"I *have* considered, madam," he replied, emphatically. "A sailor's life and happiness are both too brief to admit of prudential delays. I feel a presentiment that misfortunes await me. Let us

Gather the rose-buds while we may!  
Old time is still a-flying;  
And the flowers that bloom to-day,  
To-morrow will be a-dying.

"God bless you then, Edmond. I shall not betray your confidence to your father, but let you plead unannounced. I trust you may be successful, for Cora is a charming girl."

"I shall return so soon as I can, madam," he said, looking at his stepmother. "Why should I deceive so kind a friend? I mean to go all the way to Cornwall with Miss Noble. I could not let

her travel alone. Pray do not mention my intention to Rufus. Let me strive for my father's consent without being forestalled."

"Trust me," said the lady, and Edmond was satisfied.

All the consolation that Cora could receive in her miserable journey was hers. She had one by her side who sympathized with her tears and silent anxiety. She declined to sleep anywhere on the road, and pressed on to know the worst, if that must be the result of her mother's illness.

Edmond took her out of the mail coach at the door of the hotel, and giving her luggage to a porter, he walked by her side through the dimly-lighted town to the small cottage at the outskirts, where was Cora's home.

There was a light in the upper window, and it seemed like a good omen. Cora opened the door, which was kept unfastened, excepting when the family were all asleep, and went in softly.

"Come back for a moment, and tell me how she is, Cora."

Cora nodded.

She went into the kitchen and saw old Betty

sitting listlessly by the kitchen fire, boiling barley water.

"She is alive, Miss Cora; but the doctor don't give no hopes," said the old woman, ignorant of the meaning given by her double negative.

The spring of hope which had animated Cora in spite of herself, died down in her heart. She returned to the door, and in the darkened porch, fragrant with roses and woodbines, she received her lover's farewell embrace. They clung to each other with a miserable presentiment that they should never meet again.

Edmond's face was wet with Cora's tears—her bosom was shaken with sobs.

"You will write to me, darling Cora? I shall never be happy unless I am writing to you and receiving your letters," he continued. "I shall return immediately to Abbotsbury: address your letters there. I need only be a few hours in town to call at the Admiralty, and you will write to me, Cora."

"Every day," she replied. And holding her to his breast—

"You will ever be as true to me as now?" and she tore herself from his arms, and sought

her mother's sick room ; whilst Edmond took the night mail and returned to London.

When Cora opened softly the door of the bedchamber, she could scarcely distinguish the form of her mother in the deep shadow which one candle, and shaded from the eyes of the patient, made only more visible. She was tossing about restlessly, and muttering in her drowsy insensibility.

Margaret arose and advanced towards her sister with her finger on her lips. There was a wearied look in her face and a languor in her movements, that told of long nights of watching. They went together outside the door, and Margaret, drawing her sister into her small bedroom, desired her to go to bed, seeing from her haggard appearance that she had travelled without resting on the road,—

“ Betty shall bring you some tea. Sleep for four or five hours, and then you shall take my place.”

And Cora consented. She felt incapable from fatigue and agitation of undertaking the administration of medicine. She slept for some hours, and then, with mind and body refreshed, and

therefore more hopeful, she relieved her sister's watch by the bedside of Mrs. Noble.

When Edmond returned to Abbotsbury he found Mrs. Helmingham in a state of pleasurable excitement, and dressed with more than usual care. She was in the drawing-room, and looked very delicate and lovely, surrounded as she was by hothouse flowers and rich draperies, which contrasted well with her snowy wrapper.

"Oh! Edmond! have you heard? He is coming—your father, I mean. He will be at home this evening; and he writes, that he has some good news for me, and I should not wonder if he has brought me that diamond ring I wish so much to purchase."

"And if he has not done so, I am sure he will, as soon as he knows what your wishes are," said Edmond kindly, for he loved his stepmother for the sympathy she had evinced for his love to Cora.

"He will be so glad to see me downstairs. *That* was your doing, as I shall inform him, and the change has done me good. Look," and she raised the hitherto useless arm heavily from her lap.

Edmond took the helpless hand and kissed it respectfully.

"At what time do you expect the carriage?" he said.

"I do not know. Mr. Helmingham ordered his riding-horse to meet him at the last stage, to allow the tired animals to come on slowly. He thought it would refresh him to ride, if the weather should prove fine, after having been all day shut up in a close carriage."

"What horse will he ride?" said Edmond, with a suspicion of anxiety in the tone of his voice.

Mrs. Helmingham did not know, and Edmond speculated in silence as to whether Rufus had seen that the riding-horses had been regularly exercised in his absence.

Mrs. Helmingham had her sofa wheeled to the window, that she might see her husband on his approach to the house through the park.

"Surely it is time for him," she said, and Edmond fetched his opera-glass to range the extent of the distant approaches to the house.

"I think I see two horsemen now. One holds the gate open,—that is the groom. My father

passes through. He will be here soon now. I will go down and meet him," Edmond added, in a hoarse, hurried voice.

As he passed the bell he rang it twice, as a signal for Mrs. Helmingham's maid to attend her, and rushed downstairs like a madman. As the gate had slammed his father's horse had started forward, and seemed to be beyond his control.

The clumps of trees had hidden him, and his son could not tell whether he had succeeded in stopping the horse or not; but, knowing the difficulty from experience when the horse had not been constantly exercised, he feared that an accident might have taken place.

He called to his brother to come as he passed his room, and then sped across the park, winged by a dread of terrible misfortune.

He felt his breath failing him,—less from the violent excitement of exercise than from terror of what might be his father's fate—as he turned round a corner which had concealed the equestrians.

The pathway which ought to have been their direction was empty, but woodmen and grooms

were running to another part of the park. He struggled on, his limbs bending under him, and was joined by Rufus from another point.

They both proceeded in the direction where the servants were hastening, and presently they saw that the horse—which their father still rode, though without his hat, and with evident signs of distress—had become perfectly unmanageable, and was making towards a gate. In his mad course he passed under an old walnut tree, one of the branches of which projected low down in the trunk.

Mr. Helmingham seemed to see his danger, and flung himself forward on his horse's neck, round which he clasped his arms; but he was too late, for he struck the contorted stem with all the violence lent by the impetus of the reckless animal which bore him, and rolled heavily on the ground.

The servant who was mounted was soonest at his master's side, and tried to lift his head, which was bent back, and his whole body seemed stiffened into a zigzag from convulsion.

The man looked round for help. He could do nothing by himself. Edmond was the next

to reach the scene of the accident. The servant was touched by the sight of his white face, open lips, and the horror expressed in his eyes.

"Take comfort; he's still alive, sir!"

"Ride directly for Dr. L——!" exclaimed Captain Helmingham; and as Rufus and the rest of the pedestrians approached, he directed them to take the stable door off its hinges and bring it with a truss of hay, on which to place the injured head and helpless body of his father.

One thought only possessed the mind of Rufus,—

"Has he made a will?"

He stood looking at the body of his father, actuated only by the wish to penetrate that mystery. Whilst the eyes of Edmond watched with anxiety the duration of the spasm which held those of his father fixed and upturned, those of Rufus wandered to the watch chain, where usually hung the Bramah key which unlocked that drawer containing the parchment deed. He would have possessed himself of the watch and its accompaniments but that he feared observation. He would wait till his father was undressed.

What a sin it was, he thought, that he had not been born the eldest son. Then it would not have mattered so much. He looked at Mr. Helmingham.

"Oh, that he may live!" he exclaimed, with clasped hands, and his fine face upturned to heaven.

"Amen!" said Edmond, fervently; and he wondered in the depth of his heart that Rufus should be possessed of feelings of attachment towards his father, the intensity of which he had never before suspected; but he loved his brother all the better for such marks of anxiety and affection.

For a short space of terrible anxiety the brothers stood by the bruised and helpless body of their father, who showed small symptoms of life.

"One of us," said Edmond, "must break the news to Mrs. Helmingham."

Rufus assented, but neither of the young men liked from different motives to leave the spot. Edmond, though brave as a lion among his fellow men, shrank from the idea of giving pain to his step-mother like the veriest coward. He dared not face her grief and terror.

Rufus felt too anxious as to the result to be able to be able to leave Mr. Helmingham for an instant.

"Ah!" he continued to represent to himself, "in another week or so Edmond would have married Cora, and offended his father for ever, and I should have been safe. He may yet live, or he may already have made a will in my favour"—and then his eyes turned to the poor distorted face of Mr. Helmingham inquiringly: a sight which would have awakened feelings of unmixed commiseration in any one whose mind had been unwarped by self-interest.

The men were now seen bringing the door on which Mr. Helmingham was to be placed.

This was done carefully, and the bearers conveyed him slowly to the house.

Edmond had walked by the side till he was close to the mansion, when he went forward, and proceeded to the room of his step-mother.

"Are you come, dear? How long you have been!" said the poor lady, who hearing the footsteps of Edmond, heavy with the adverse tidings with which he was laden, thought her husband

had approached, but was too helpless to rise and rush to welcome him.

Very tenderly Edmond broke to her the intelligence of the accident, and tried to soothe the grief which his narrative excited, by the expression of hope he was far from feeling.

"O that Cora were here!" cried the poor lady. "I miss her so much! She would have been so useful—women always are to the sick—all excepting a poor helpless creature like myself."

Edmond said nothing, but how cordially he joined in the wish need not be stated.

"Go and find me out how he is now. No, do not come back till he is undressed. Cut off his clothes. Be gentle. Ah! now, indeed, I feel my infirmity."

These were the lamentations which pursued the son who sought his father's room intent on filial duty. Rufus was there, and Mr. Helmingham was laid on his bed, still dressed, as the attendants were fearful of doing mischief by their unskilled ministrations till the arrival of the medical man who should direct them.

In the presence of the valet, who never left his master, Rufus dared not possess himself of the

key so eagerly coveted. He must wait, he knew.

The doctor arrived with his partner, and requested that every one should leave the room, excepting the valet, whose services might be required.

The sons awaited the result of the examination with white faces in the ante-room.

The medical attendants came out at length with grave faces, and gave their opinion in a low voice. There was concussion of the brain, which might prove fatal, but the case was not hopeless. The temporal artery had been opened, and the patient had seemed to breathe more freely. They would return again in the morning. In the meantime, the house was to be kept in profound quiet, and cold lotions to be applied to the head.

"Tell me exactly the truth as far as you know it," said Rufus. "What chance is there of my father's recovery?"

"We cannot tell exactly—a few hours will decide—at present the danger is imminent."

Night came down on the troubled household of the rich man. Rufus begged to be the one to

sit up with his father, as he said truly that he was fresh, and Edmond wearied by a long journey, and therefore unfitted for the responsibility.

To this the elder brother assented, and it was thus arranged, the valet sleeping in the ante-room, in case he might be wanted.

The watch-light was lit, the room left in gloom and silence, and Rufus was alone with the unconscious form of his father, who lay still, with half-open eyes, in which there was no seeming recognition.

There were two doors to this sleeping room, one leading to the ante-room, and another on to the staircase communicating with the story below.

Rufus sat by the side of his father's bed, revolving many circumstances till his heart thumped against his breast—till he felt as if his father must be disturbed by its pulsations, which he half thought must be audible.

"Everything depends on quiet, they said. I saw him put the watch in that long, heavy drawer. It creaks dreadfully. I *must* get to that bureau with the key. But what if I startle him ! I might accelerate his death—that would

be horrible, unless indeed he has made a will in my favour."

A smile stole over his face at the flattering supposition ; but evil as he was, he checked the idea.

"Poor fellow ! *if* he had done so, I should be glad that he lived ten years longer."

Then he considered that ten years was a long time to wait, and to have to read up for that most tedious of all professions—the law.

"I should be smoke-dried and withered at thirty-five, with an ugly bald patch at the top of my head, over which I should try to coax a few straggling hairs ; and the women would sneer at the effort to retain an appearance of youth, and laugh at me secretly."

He put his fingers through the glossy curls of golden hue, and the touch of his own head reminded him of his father's, and he dipped the cambric handkerchief into the eau-de-cologne and water, and placed it over the patient's brow. Then he resigned himself again to his reflections. The door into the next room where the valet slept was open ; he went on tiptoe to close it.

He was so fearful of occasioning any sound

that his heart beat faster even at that leisurely movement.

The heavy damask hangings of the bed, though they were but partially drawn round it, gave a depressing sensation of suffocation and gloom to the bedchamber. The clock struck two, and the sounds of life had died out of the house ; only the watchdog's short bark, succeeded by a melancholy howl, broke on the silence of night.

“ It will not do to wait till morning, and I shall have to call Robert if he gets worse. I *must* see that parchment. If the will be in my favour—well. If not, could it be possible——?”

He thought of his power of simulating the handwriting of others, a power which, having discovered by chance when he was a youth, he had cultivated, first, simply from the pleasure conveyed by the exercise of skill, and then with a kind of prescience that it might be useful to him.

But it was too hazardous—at least at the first birth of the idea. There was no harm in seeing the will, if he could but get the key of the bureau.

He rose softly and advanced a few steps across the room towards the chest of drawers, when he thought that he heard a slight noise, and turning round he fancied that the balls of his father's half-open eyes were directed towards him.

He stopped, every limb fixed by terror into the position which they had held when he first perceived the look. The eyes seemed, however, fixed. It had been but the freak of his excited imagination, he thought, but he went back softly to his seat.

The clock chimed the half hour. What a weak fool he felt himself to be ! This time he would not be balked ; and he moved with less caution across the room, and tried to open the drawer. With strength not well controlled, for his nervousness made his movement jerky and uncertain, he pulled out the drawer with a loud noise, and beyond its proper balance ; and simultaneously some inarticulate sound, harsh and guttural, proceeded from the throat of the helpless tenant of the bed. He turned, and met his father's eyes with a look of reproach which filled him with horror.

He closed the drawer as softly as he could, taking first from its recesses the watch, and beginning deliberately to wind it, and depositing it on the drawers instead of inside, and then returned to renew the cold application on Mr. Helmingham's brow.

The father made no further sign of consciousness. Again the eyes were made dull by a film, and Rufus returned to the drawers and removed the Bramah key from the ring which terminated the chain.

With this he left the room with the lighted candle, and proceeded to the library. The consciousness that his intentions were illicit made him nervous. As he went along the dark corridors he fancied he heard footsteps behind him, and thought voices were calling him from distant rooms. This idea was so strongly impressed on his mind that he nerved himself to stop and listen, but nothing repaid the effort. The sounds had been imaginary.

He went on with swifter footsteps, but on opening the library door hastily the sudden draught blew out the candle.

He was nervous and flurried, and grudged

going back all the way to relight it, but gleaning from the dull red light that there were embers in the grate, Rufus thrust the candle amongst them in the hope of igniting it; but he was like an unskilful lover, who by too much eagerness loses the little flame he tries to increase; and in the midst of his efforts he was startled by the loud ringing of a bell which seemed to proceed from his father's room.

There is always something eerie in the thought that the creature we have just left helpless, stretched on his bed insensible, and nearly lifeless, is suddenly reinstated in the power of locomotion, and weird, and disabled as we have watched him, is coming after us to rebuke our shortcomings, and to look if not to utter reproaches for neglected duties.

Rufus dropped the key amongst the ashes, and with trembling limbs and chattering teeth felt his way back to his father's room, where he found the valet struggling to keep Mr. Helmingham in the bed. To leave the room again was impossible. The patient was a powerful man, and delirium had added force to his muscles. Till daylight both Rufus and the servant were occu-

pied in coercing him, when he remained quiet and slept, or seemed to sleep. Rufus descended to the library, and found, on advancing to the fire-place, that the servant had already cleared away the ashes, and relighted the fire ; the key was gone. He would not now ask the maid if she had seen it—*that* might wait, for on the table were laid all the letters which had that morning arrived for his father. A large official seal attracted his attention, and he took it up to his room. The contents astounded him ; his father being informed therein that on the payment of certain fees he and his heirs lawfully begotten would be entitled to the appellation of Baron Helmingham. This then was the mysterious business which had occupied his father in town. Rufus had never suspected this ; the blow was a stunning one. The title would ensure the succession to the estates to his elder brother. His father might leave them as he liked ; but having cared sufficiently for the title to agitate for its possession, he would be certain to let wealth gild its owner, when that owner would be his eldest son.

Rufus sat down with a very white face. There was just a possibility that a will had been already

made in his favour, and that the death of his father now, before he recovered his intellect sufficiently to make a fresh disposition of his property, might leave Edmond but a barren honour. He thought of the dropped key, and would have cursed himself for the trembling hands that could not retain their grasp, but that he was too sensible ever to regret the past. "Let the dead bury their dead," he thought. "Let a mistake be remembered only to rectify it as soon as possible, and never to be groaned over."

He was of a hopeful disposition, this young man, so guileful in his intellect, and so tortuous in his conduct. He thought of his chances of succession to the title and estates, and his hopes revived.

"Edmond was such a dare-devil ! His profession exposed him to constant perils by land and by water. He was going probably for three years to the coast of Africa to look for slavers, and the climate might do its work without the aid of the men-of-war of the enemy. That is true ; but if he marries that girl he may leave another claimant in the shape of an infant son," Rufus considered. "Granted," he reasoned. "Then he must *not*

marry her. I must be an idiot, if I cannot prevent that folly. It suited me that he should commit it before ; now it must be stopped."

He proceeded to the room Cora had occupied, to see if he could find any scraps of writing in her hand, which might be useful to him. Chance befriended him ; she had purposely omitted to take a commonplace book, into which she had been writing extracts from volumes which Margaret's want of means prevented her purchasing. She hoped to return to Abbotsbury and finish the collection : in the meantime the book was but half filled, and must be completed in the future.

A nurse had been sent for to attend to Mr., now Lord, Helmingham, though Rufus was the only person cognizant of his father's right to that title. When the doctors arrived they pronounced their patient better, though in great danger, and requiring the utmost care and quietness. The mind was still absent from his bruised and irritated frame, but hope had set in in the hearts of those who valued him, and they nursed him more skilfully under its influence.

Before the post left in the afternoon a long letter to Cora, written as sailors only can write

when they love, was taken from the letter-box, and safely deposited in the pocket of Rufus. Sailors, often placed amongst companions very ungenial to themselves, find consolation frequently in the love so sad, so tender, so profound, which they feel for those dear to them. With little variety in their lives that results not from the elements, air and water—pent in their small prison, their thought dwells with deeper earnestness on those at home; and each fond remembrance is narrated in their journal-like writings, whilst they

Think of those green willows,  
And wish themselves on shore.

Edmond had been but a few days separated from his love, yet what sheetsful of thickly-written expressions of tenderness were conveyed in that pilfered letter! He was counting the hours before he might hear from her, he said—and Rufus knew from his brother's calculation how to intercept the letter before it should reach its destination.

She did not know his handwriting—had probably never seen it; and should she have

done so, few could ever detect any difference in the writing of the brothers.

He did not think Edmond had ever seen any note ever written by Cora. He knew nothing of her epistolary style. Rufus would be able to copy a few phrases out of her letters, when she wrote any.

## CHAPTER VIII.

O dear life ! when shall it be,  
That mine eyes thine eyes may see ?  
And in them thy mind discover  
Whether absence has had force  
Thy remembrance to divorce  
From the image of thy lover ?

SIR PHILIP SYDNEY.

### EDMOND'S LETTER.

" MY DEAREST !—What a world of joy for me is comprised in those two words ! Cora ! how beautiful you have made life to me ! I feel as if I trod on air. The world seems filled with the glory your love has diffused over it. My beautiful queen ! I feel lost in wonder that you can give your heart to one who is such a contrast to yourself. Do you, can you really love me ? And Rufus is so handsome, so winning in his manner ; and I am so untaught in women's ways. Pray do not deceive me, Cora—you would wring my heart if you did—perhaps, even

break it ; but though hearts do not break at their owners' bidding, your falsehood would blot and disfigure my whole life.

“ Tell me truly, my darling, you don’t love my brother. Convince me of it, by repeated as-severations. I feel as I write this, how absurd, how insulting to you is the question—put when the sweet words of love’s confession are ringing still in my ears, when my lips quiver at the memory of the last kiss I imprinted on yours.

“ I have never before had any to love me,—anyone on whom I might lavish the wealth of tenderness and passion I have treasured in my heart. My poor mother died when I was too young to understand the bitterness of that loss. In the stirring scenes of my manhood I did not miss the tenderness of household joys; but on seeing you, a thousand fresh hopes and wishes sprang up as suddenly as the verdure after an Arctic winter.

“ I loved you as soon as I saw you. I felt an insane jealousy of the young man I had seen in your presence. I felt sure you loved each other. Ah ! how happy I am that it is not so !

“ The journey down into Cornwall seemed so

short ! You were then safe inside the coach, and I could look at you whenever we stopped to change horses. I saw your look of admiration given to the pretty church at Ivy Bridge, and I looked at it with pleasure in returning, because your eyes had rested on it.

“ As I sit here in my room looking out on the landscape, so stately in its ancient beauty—on the avenues of dense foliage and the herds of mottled deer, half seen in the shadows of the clustered oaks, I feel that much as I should rejoice in their possession, I would give them up willingly for you, and be content with some cottage near the sea, where you could watch for my return, and be the first to greet me.

“ In a few hours, my darling,—my heart’s delight ! my father will return, and before he sleeps I will pour out all my hopes and wishes to him ; but whatsoever may be his decision, it will not affect mine. You shall be my wife, if you will accept me for your husband.

\* \* \* \* \*

“ Alas ! my Cora ! my happiness is delayed—a fearful accident to my father, which has rendered him insensible, will make my appeal to him

impossible. I must send this at present, or it will be too late for the post. I have calculated to an hour when I can hear from you. O my love, do not let me wait and watch in vain !

“ Your true lover,

“ EDMOND.”

“ She can wait, that Miss Cora,” said Rufus, as he pocketed the letter, when, having abstracted it secretly from the letter-bag, he retired to his room, and locked the door, before he made himself master of the contents.

“ It will do her no harm to be kept on tenter-hooks for a little while ; and the uncertainty, however painful, will not be so unpleasant as the letter, when it does arrive. Curious, that she should love that ugly-faced fellow, Edmond. So he has been kissing her again, has he ? Well, so did I ; and a devil’s own row she made about it. She *can’t* love *him* really ;” and his eyes glanced at the reflection of his own handsome person in the cheval-glass.

“ So he would give up the Helmingham oaks for her ! You’ll have to give them up, my fine fellow, without having such a desirable compensa-

tion. Ha, ha! what fun!" and Rufus threw himself into an easy chair, and laughed, partly in derision, partly in reckless defiance of fate. His future did not seem promising, and the peerage was an unexpected blow; yet he said, musing, as good doctor Watts says,—

My purposes are ripening fast;  
Unfolding every hour.  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

But there was no time to lose in meditation, whether pleasant or otherwise. He put on a cap, and strolled out to the stable, looking for and finding a little boy who was sometimes at the command of the stablemen, sometimes of the cook.

Of this child of ten years he enquired where the ashes were thrown, and whether they were sifted.

The boy scratched his head, and said, "*They should ought by rights.*"

"Why have you not done it? Let me see you do it, directly," continued Rufus.

And the child went to the large heap of cinders, and throwing some into the sifter, began to push the machine backwards and forwards till

he became almost invisible in the cloud of dust which surrounded him.

"What a dirty business!" said Rufus to himself; but he was thinking of the innocent ashes, and not of the dirty business in which he was engaged.

"Hi! stop that thing, can't you?" he exclaimed; for, standing at a distance, he saw the glitter of the key, whilst the boy, in his proximity, kept his eyes fast to prevent the dust from blinding him.

The child stopped, and before he was aware what his young master was about, Rufus had secured the key, and walked away, with an injunction to the boy not to neglect his work in future.

He had it now. In a short time he should know whether to wish Lord Helmingham to live or die.

"'Tis a mercy my lady is paralytic," said Rufus; "otherwise, like the rest of her sex, she would be sure to be prying about where I do not want her company."

He passed on to the library, holding the key grasped in the palm of his hand. He will not

drop it this time. His hand shakes, however, as he tries to fit the key to the lock. He fails. The key refuses to act on it.

"Stupid that I am!" he exclaims, and taking his breastpin, he begins deliberately to pick out the small particles of dust and ashes with which the bore is filled. Then he knocks it on the table, and tries again.

"A step! What a nuisance. That fellow Edmond! What can *he* want, prying about here?"

Edmond only wanted a copy of Falconer's "Shipwreck" to amuse himself with. He found the book, and retired, while Rufus seemed to be looking intently at a Directory on the table.

Edmond had no sooner departed than Rufus applied the key, when he had to withdraw his hand in a hurry, for the footman entered with coals.

Rufus could not take out the provoking key, which had resisted the first application, and now, once applied, would not be withdrawn.

What would the man think, Rufus pondered, if he saw his master's secret drawers in danger of being examined, whilst the owner was un-

conscious? So he leaned his elbows on the table, and turned the leaves of the Directory, and wished, for once, that he was a woman, whose petticoats would have concealed the glitter of the offensive steel.

At length the man, after prolonging the process of raking out the bottom bar, piling the top with coals, and sweeping the hearth as if his life depended on not a particle of dust being left on the bright surface of the fender, during which time he had been watching the evident impatience of Rufus, departed to repeat the same operation in the sitting room of his mistress.

The poor lady felt her helplessness deeply. She was useless, when she would have given worlds to watch beside her husband's bed. She had lost the ministration of Cora, and had nothing to relieve her anxiety, or to occupy her time; consequently when the footman came in to make up the fire, she tried to create a little interest to herself in the occupations of others—

“Have you heard how your master is lately, William?”

“The nurse has just left him to take her

dinner, and says that he is going on nicely, ma'am."

"Where are the young gentlemen?"

"Captain Helmingham is sitting reading by master's bedside, and Mr. Rufus is in the library, ma'am—"

"What was he doing?"

"I can't rightly say—turning over the leaves of a book, ma'am, I believe."

"Oh dear! I wish Cora could come back," said the poor lady, as the footman left the room. "If I cannot have Cora I must have some other companion," and her thoughts travelled to a charming girl, a distant relation of her own, in whose appearance there was a look betokening that in some one of her progenitors there had been a cross of Indian blood. She would get one of the young men to write Lola Louis to come and stay with her for a few weeks.

Rufus was at length at liberty to possess himself of the desired parchment.

He turned the key, opened the drawer, and abstracting the document, he looked at it hurriedly, and seeing the words, "last will and testament," he clutched the legal instrument,

and placing it inside the breast of his coat, buttoned it up, locked the drawer, abstracted the key, and sought the seclusion of his room.

“Am I never to have any peace?” he said, thrusting the will into a drawer, and locking it carefully, as he heard the step of Edmond coming along the passage.

“Old fellow, will you take a turn with me?” said the elder brother. “I want to talk with you. The nurse has at length finished her dinner. I suppose those people being deprived of their natural amount of sleep, take it out in eating. I thought she would never return.”

Rufus smoothed his brow, and smiled benignly.

“I will attend you directly,” he said in his sweetest voice. “After all,” he thought, “it’s only a little delay, and I shall not lose any time. I can do a little business with this mad fool of a man; he shall be made to dance a little, like a bear on hot plates of iron, before I have done with him.”

They passed from the house through a flower-covered porch, and entered the park, which was

glorious in its breadth of golden sunshine, and the massed foliage of forest trees.

Through an avenue of beeches the brothers directed their steps, for the sake of the shadow it afforded.

A small Italian greyhound belonging to Mrs. Helmingham bounded by the side of Rufus.

“What a blessing it is that my father is better!” said Edmond, his face beaming with satisfaction. His long absences from home had prevented those frequent recurrences of petty irritations which so often destroy the affections of domestic life between grown persons of the same sex.

His love for Cora made his heart expand with benevolence towards all the world, and especially towards his father, whose life had been so recently endangered, and to whose recovery he looked for the confirmation of his happiness with his future wife.

“You think him better?” said Rufus, doubtfully. He would not commit himself, and knew not what to say or think till he had read the will.

“Better, certainly,” replied Edmond: “of

course he is ; Doctor L—— and the nurse say so. Why should you doubt it?" he cried impatiently.

" Only," said Rufus, that " he who greatly loves, greatly fears."

" That is true," rejoined Edmond, meditating, for his thoughts flew off to other love besides filial. " He who greatly loves, greatly fears," he repeated ; " that is fearfully true. Were you ever in love, Rufus ?"

Rufus gave a short laugh for an answer, and flung a rotten bough for Fido to fetch.

" Ah ! you will not tell me. Never mind, my brother, I will be more candid ; I love with all my heart and soul."

" Indeed !" said Rufus ; " whom may she be ? Some Yarico with a skin like brown satin ? or some Maltese girl, with her rich beauty flashing under her black silken headgear ? Perhaps some Greek lady, with a straight nose and short upper lip, velvet jacket and white symar—"

" Why not an English girl ?"

" My dear boy, I can scarcely think that you are of a disposition so inflammable as to have

caught fire at the flash of a pair of blue eyes already."

"I have, though," Edmond replied, bluntly.  
"I love Cora Noble!"

"Cora Noble!" exclaimed Rufus, in a tone of well-acted dismay and astonishment.

"Well!" exclaimed the elder brother; "is there anything so extraordinary in this statement?"

"That you should love Cora Noble?—no."

"You mean," retorted Edmond, "that you cannot believe that she can care for such a damned ugly fellow as I am!" and his face worked with strong emotion.

"Heaven forbid that I should harbour such a thought!" said Rufus, with an intonation of virtuous indignation which expressed as much as the words did. "The idea flashed on me, but I am too good a brother to indulge it."

Edmond was piqued.

"Not only do I love her, but I have the assurance of her affection in return."

Rufus turned his face suddenly on his brother with an expression of unmitigated astonishment.

" You do not believe me ?" said the elder.

" I quite believe such to be your conviction," responded Rufus. " But, my dear brother, you have lived in happy isolation from the wiles of that charming sex. From my residence on shore whilst you have danced on the bosom of the faithless deep, I have fathomed the dispositions of so many of those fair creatures that I am incredulous of their truth. But with due respect to Miss Cora Noble, and to any young lady you honour with your affection, I will think as well of her as circumstances will permit."

" What the devil do you mean ?"

" Oh, nothing ! But are you quite sure *you* are the object of her affection ?"

" Perfectly," said Edmond, hotly.

Rufus smiled a provoking smile.

" For the love of heaven, Rufus," exclaimed Edmond, turning suddenly, and seizing his arm, " I implore you to tell me if she loves *you* !"

" My dear fellow, you ask too much. A man is on honour under such circumstances. He cannot cease to be a gentleman though a woman is——"

" Go on."

"Well, is a *leetle* imprudent, we will call it."

Edmond turned furiously on him.

"You mistake, my warm-hearted brother. I owe it to our relationship to tell you the truth. I have no accusation to make against Miss Cora, except that she seemed to regard me with eyes so favourable that I was rather amazed when I heard from you that the same fond glances had been turned on you. I do not think there is much harm in the girl; but they are devilish poor at home, and I dare say she is anxious to get married as soon as she can, from the best of motives—to escape from the pressure of poverty herself, and to relieve her own people from the burthen of her maintenance."

"Have you any proof of what you assert?" said Edmond, trying to still the tempest of passion which raged in his breast.

"I cannot tell you everything without acting dishonourably to her; you must perceive my dilemma—"

"Tell me," interrupted Edmund, "do you profess, have you professed, honourable love to Miss Noble?"

"Certainly not, my dear, impetuous brother! The utmost I have ever done has been to respond to some little advances made on her part—natural enough under the circumstances of two young people being much together in a nearly empty house. I told you before that I don't think that she meant any harm."

"Will you be so good as to explain what you mean by 'advances'?"

"Oh, trifles—nothing of consequence! Sitting with Mrs. Helmingham, one evening, I flung an ivory alphabet on the table, which Miss Noble had never seen before. I gave her the usual catch words to arrange, such as 'spirit, strife, priest, sprite,' &c., after which she pushed four letters towards me *v-o-l-e*. I arranged it immediately as she meant it to be, 'love,' and with a pretty little laugh she placed before it a capital 'I,' and after it the letter 'u.' She pretended to look confused, and swept the letters from the table into the box; but some dropped on the floor, and as she stooped at the same time as myself to pick them up, our heads came into juxtaposition, and then—I scarcely know how—our faces, and my lips touched her cheek, which

brought a deeper tint of colour on its rounded, peach-like bloom. That was the *first* time I kissed her," said Rufus, with a half sigh, as of delicious memories.

Edmond writhed. " Go on," he said.

" Well, I met her in the garret when she went to fetch a music-book—but I need not particularise."

" You met her there? You appointed her to meet you there, perhaps?"

" No; I knew she went up, and followed her; but we did meet by appointment sometimes."

" Can you give me any proof of this?"

" I should think the word of a gentleman might suffice."

" Pardon me; I do not think your conduct towards that young lady has been that of a gentleman."

" I can forgive you, my dear Edmond. Of course, you are irritated; but 'tis better you should know the truth before you throw yourself away on a girl like Miss Cora Noble, when your worth and position might command the best-conducted and carefully educated girl in

England. I have a note or two of hers, and I will show you a little crumpled bit of paper she put into my hand one night as we shook hands before leaving Mrs. Helmingham's sitting-room to retire to our rooms. You have probably seen her handwriting, and will recognise it if it be identical."

"You have it with you?"

"No, I will give it to you when we return to the house."

"Pray, how do you account for the young lady's seeming preference for myself?" said Edmond.

"I confess," said Rufus, "that I was attracted by the girl, and could not resist the love-making she offered me. You will think me a shocking scamp, I am afraid, when I confess that, in passing the door of her bedroom one night, I tried the handle of the lock, and, finding it open, I went in. She was standing before the glass, with her hair unfastened, and looking inexpressibly lovely. Of course, the usual dialogue took place, broken by emotion. The lady entreated me to leave her, and I said I would go, and did not, at least, at once. However, I did

not wish to compromise myself, or do her any real injury, so I left her where she stood, blushing and trembling, and expecting an offer of marriage next morning. I was determined to have an explanation on the following day, but I confess to have been greatly tempted by her beauty, and unwilling to interrupt the good understanding between us, so I put it off. It had to be made, however. I told her I could not marry her, and she seemed as greatly distressed as I was; but she so soon consoled herself with you, that I might have spared my sympathy."

" You will show me that scrap of paper?"

" I will return to the house, and look for it at once," said Rufus, frankly.

Edmond's pulse was throbbing hurriedly. The habit for self-command, exercised in his profession for years, was needed to keep down the torrents of rage and despair that swelled in his breast.

He had began to listen with incredulity, but every fresh sentence of his brother's statement weakened his reliance on Cora's truth.

Rufus seemed to tell the facts by degrees, and without any malice. He did not want to accuse her—only to save his brother.

Edmond thought of his own ugliness, and of the beauty of person and gracefulness of address possessed by Rufus, and his heart sank within him.

They returned silently to the house, and Rufus retired to his room to write the scrap of paper which was to simulate Cora's calligraphy, and Edmond strolled into Mrs. Helmingham's sitting-room, and addressed a few words of kindness to her. A book was lying by her side—Thompson's "Seasons." Edmond took it up.

"Ah!" said his stepmother, "I have no one to read to me now Cora is gone."

The book was handsomely bound, and had the name of Rufus Helmingham in the title-page.

"Was Miss Noble engaged in reading this to you?"

"Yes, poor girl! there is her pencil between the leaves now, just as she left it."

Edmund opened at the page, and closed it

again, sick at heart. There was a slight pencil line outside the following passage,—

Dear youth ! by fortune favoured, but by love  
Favoured, alas ! not less, be still  
As now discreet : the time  
May come, thou needst not fly.

She had read this with her nocturnal adventure with his brother fresh in her mind. She had marked the passage that he might see what he only, as she imagined, could understand.

Conviction of her falsehood was now undoubted in his mind, and needed not the bit of paper on which was written, in a perfect simulation of her handwriting, “ To-morrow at ten, in the wilderness.”

Edmond left the presence of his stepmother as soon as he could do so without incivility. He wanted to be alone—to be able to contend with the tempest which was tearing him to shreds, without the necessity of composing his face to a placid expression, or modulating his voice to the soft tones required in civilized life.

This unhappy young man felt all things acutely. His joys and his sorrows had always been excessive.

Praise from his superiors in naval rank had always elated him more than his more placid companions, and blame had depressed him almost to despair.

The belief that he had possessed the love of a beautiful and innocent girl had opened a well-spring of happiness so deep, so pure, so sparkling!

It had given such freshness and fertility, such brightness and fragrance, to all the little circumstances connected with his life. And now the fount was downtrodden and muddy, the flowers of life crushed and defiled, and the unconscious spoiler of his happiness had been his own brother!

It gave a horror like that of incest to the thought that Rufus had lingered over those fresh-looking lips which he had believed to be virgin except to his own. He hated his brother!

He would have liked to strangle him, he thought; and he clenched his hands till the nails

sank deep into his palms as he hurried along the wilderness, with a movement which was more of a run than a walk.

He seemed in his distorted feeling to hate him more because, as he had injured him unconsciously, Edmond had no legitimate cause of quarrel with him.

He tried to think of his conduct dispassionately.

How should he have judged him from his own statement had he heard the circumstances without having ever seen the young lady?

"I should have said he acted like a scoundrel," was the first answer.

But his conscience reproved him. A beautiful girl had made the first advances.

"Oh, Cora ! Cora !" Should he himself under similar circumstances have been more of a saint ?

He did not stay to answer the question,—the storm of passion swept him onwards. He would go down to Cornwall. He would crush her with his contempt. He would upbraid her with her perfidy.

How could he? On what grounds could he reproach her? She had been

Off with the old love,  
Before she was on with the new.

In either case she had wanted a husband, and had found the elder brother a greater fool than the younger.

No, he would never think of her. He would expunge her from his memory,—that beautiful, soft-looking, deceitful girl!

Poor child! She had loved his brother, no doubt. Rufus was handsome in his person and winning in his manners.

Alas! does poverty then drive woman to this legalised prostitution? She had failed to secure the man she loved,—she had succeeded in attracting one for whom she cared nothing. He thought of the timid reluctance with which she had striven to disengage herself from his caresses, and that which had in reality proceeded from maiden coyness he interpreted to indicate a loathing for himself, resulting from her remembrance of the kisses Rufus had impressed on her lips.

Anyway, he was utterly wretched. Why had he, on whom Nature and accident had impressed the stamp of ugliness, ever thought of love, or that he could be an object of preference to a beautiful young woman ?

No ; he must go back to his career without a yearning thought of the domestic happiness which had seemed to dawn upon him. Love and its fruits were not for him.

It was more dignified to succumb without an effort—without a struggle to repossess himself of an object so worthless. This he resolved on as he strode along through the lime avenues, already sprinkled with the first pale leaves of autumn.

The cold wind whirled them from the branches, which bent and creaked as the blast rushed by and swept their retroverted foliage.

Edmond crushed with rage beneath his heel the moss-covered pieces of dead wood which had been gathered into small heaps by some careful hands. He looked defiantly at the masses of turbid vapour careering over the face of the sky.

“ Oh, that I were at sea ! ” said the miserable

young man. "What though the masts were quivering and the sails were rent to tatters ! I should have an object and an occupation—an object in trying to save others, and in the effort I should forget that I am a useless spar, tossed hither and thither by the waves, and only not crushed by reason of very insignificance and isolation. No one can love me, and I so yearn for love ! No one will care if in the next engagement with some French privateer I am stricken down on my own deck. Yes," he continued, with a bitter laugh, "the first lieutenant will rejoice, as in thought he takes off my epaulettes and fastens them to his own uniform."

Then a change came over his humour. He would see her again and talk to her kindly. He would not reproach her, poor girl ! His heart seemed bursting with his accumulated tenderness towards her.

He would go down at once. He looked at his watch. It was too late that day to catch the mail to London.

Then he thought of his father lingering on the threshold of eternity. "What an unnatural

brute I am!" he exclaimed. "I had forgotten all in this mad passion for a girl of whose existence I was unaware three months ago. I *must* wait till he is out of danger. In the meantime I will write to her. I will tell her what I have heard of her attachment to Rufus, and implore her to tell me if it is true."

He hurried back to carry out this new idea, more reconciled for the moment to his sorrow as soon as it contained an element of activity.

Rufus looked from his bed-room window on the rambling unequal footsteps of his brother, and recognised how deeply his poisoned arrow had sped into that brother's heart, and laughed.

He had not much time for self-gratulation, for now he unlocks his drawer and takes from it his father's last will and testament.

Very carefully did he go through the document, and his eyes sparkled as he read it, for after a few unimportant legacies the bulk of his property was left to his dear son Rufus, and £100 per annum only to Edmond, the elder brother.

"Worthy, excellent man!" exclaimed the youth; "really a most wonderful father! I am overwhelmed with gratitude! I declare I am affected even to tears!" and he gave a little laugh as he folded up the crackling skin, and then very stealthily he returned it to his father's writing-table; and going as quietly to the sick room he took the watch from the drawer and replaced the key on the gold ring on which were suspended the seals.

He looked at his father, who was lying asleep or insensible, with a wet rag placed over his head. The nurse was seated in the ante-room. Rufus drew her after him into the outer passage.

"Your master does not look quite so well, nurse; do you see any alteration?"

"Master seems a little weaker, sir. I shall be glad when the doctors come this evening. I don't like to give him anything without orders."

The heart of Rufus beat high with hope.

"Heavens! if he should die! What a chance for a younger brother! I was right to replace that will; it should be found in the depository of

the deceased. The game seems to be played to my hand. The ripe plum seems ready to drop into my mouth."

He returned once more and looked at the re-cumbent form within the curtains, and then retired on tiptoe to his own bedchamber.

## CHAPTER IX.

There in that bed so closely curtained round,  
Worn to a shade and wan with slow decay,  
A father sleeps! Oh, hushed be every sound,  
Soft may we breathe the midnight hours away!

IN the meantime Edmund had written to Cora thus :—

“ Abbotsbury.

“ I have had a conversation with my brother this day, who has been very candid in his statements as to the terms of tender intimacy which existed between you before I came to Abbotsbury. I would spare you any prolonged statement on this subject, but is or is not his story true? Have you been in the habit of meeting him secretly and by written appointment?

“ Write candidly, and I will try to forgive the agony of mind I am suffering and must suffer. Say ‘It is true,’ or ‘It is false.’

“ EDMOND HELMINGHAM.”

Captain Helmingham deposited this letter in the letter-bag, from which Rufus abstracted it just before it was carried to the post-office.

"She will write to him, I trust. I shall want a letter from her with the Trevedra post-mark. 'Tis fortunate that he has saved me a world of trouble in imitation of her writing, for three words will suffice."

That night the doctors looked grave when they examined their patient. Though the violence of the symptoms of pressure on the brain had in a great measure subsided, there was considerable exhaustion, so that they feared he might sink during the next twenty-four hours. This opinion they imparted to the brothers, who waited in the ante-room to hear the first intelligence of Mr. Helmingham's health.

"It is important," said Dr. L——, "that some responsible person should be in the room to see that stimulants are given every half hour, or oftener, should the pulse indicate a necessity for resorting to such means. Perhaps you gentlemen would divide the night between you."

"I am quite ready to sit up all night," said

Edmond, who felt too miserable to go to bed, and thought he could never sleep soundly again.

"I should prefer a fresh watcher about two o'clock or half-past. It is so much for the benefit of the patient that the intellect should be fresh and unwearied by hours of anxious observation."

"Then Rufus shall be called to take my place at three o'clock," said the elder son.

Rufus expressed his willingness; and it was arranged that the valet should summon him at the specified time.

Edmond loathed the sight of his successful rival—of the man who had had the fruit offered to his lips, and had from prudence or carelessness forbore to taste it. It made him shudder to hear that sweet, careless voice, which had awakened him from such dreams of joy. He stated that he should like to have his orders written down, to avoid a possibility of mistake, and that having been accomplished, he desired to be installed as nurse forthwith.

He was irritated by the voices of those around him; distracted by their commonplace speeches. He fancied that in the interest of watching his

father's life vibrating in the balance between existence and its extinction, he should forget the dull pain of disappointed love.

He asked for a cup of coffee, which, to his vexation, Rufus brought himself, with a look of tender sympathy.

"Be sure to call me, my brother," said he.

"Certainly," replied Edmond, drily; and he was left alone.

He had scarcely settled himself in the arm-chair by his father's bed, when a gentle tap was heard at the door, and Edmond rose with irritation to enquire who knocked.

It was the maid of Mrs. Helmingham, with an entreaty that Edmond would come to her room when he left his father, to report on his state.

Edmond promised, and then was left undisturbed.

He looked with tender pity on the strong, healthy man, so suddenly stricken down in the career of all his interests, and when he had scarcely had time to enjoy the possession of the property so newly acquired.

But his father had never expanded towards his sons with paternal fondness during their

childhood, and Edmond having gone to sea at twelve years of age, had seen but little of Mr. Helmingham since that period.

Edmond sat with the watch at his side, to observe the movement of the minute hand towards the half hour.

He saw it without perceiving it. He could see nothing but Cora in the embrace of his brother, and he with difficulty repressed the groan which rose to his lips.

Would the minutes never go? Only three had passed since he last looked at the watch, and yet what years of torment he seemed to have undergone! Then his thoughts wandered to the Sultan in the fairy tale, who dipped his head into the tank of enchanted water, and before he withdrew it, had passed in idea through the harassing vicissitudes of a long life.

His father moved; and Edmond saw that five-and-twenty minutes had elapsed since his last dose of brandy, and wondered whether he might anticipate the time by five minutes. His sailor habits of punctuality, and strict obedience of orders, prompted delay; his common sense, immediate action.

He obeyed the latter, and lifting his father's head, administered the tablespoonful of brandy and water.

Mr. Helmingham slept again, and Edmond was left to his meditation for another thirty minutes.

He lifted the cup of coffee to his lips, for his parched tongue craved for moisture. The taste was unpleasant, and he set it down and filled a tumbler from the carafe, and drank it instead.

The restless desire to see Cora returned. He felt that he could not wait her reply.

The five days seemed like five years in anticipation to this eager-hearted young man.

Should death result, he would start immediately. If his father rallied, he trusted he would soon be out of danger, and then he would be free to take his own course. He would recover, he trusted.

Edmond had to awaken him for his second and third doses ; and his pulse and breathing seemed improving.

At two o'clock he was very much better ; and Edmond left the room to call Rufus, whom he

found, with a pale face and stealthy step, listening at the door.

"I was so anxious," said Rufus, apologetically.

"Of course," replied his brother, quietly. "He is much better;" and Edmond passed him, without looking at the countenance of the brother he detested, which he would have seen livid with disappointment.

When Rufus had heard Edmond ask for a cup of coffee, he took it from the servant, and carrying it to his room, added to it such a dose of laudanum as would, he thought, effectually prevent his being a good watcher. If his father should die by the neglect of Edmond, not the slightest censure could fall on Rufus.

He was sleepless; ever on tiptoe, lingering at the door of the bedroom, uncertain whether from the death-like silence that prevailed inside, Edmond slept under the influence of the opiate, and his father, a sleep yet more profound—for Edmond's movements were noiseless, to prevent any needless irritation to the nerves of the brain, and were consequently inaudible through the thick, well-fitting doors of the bedroom.

Edmond passed at once to the sleeping apartment of his step-mother to give her the favourable intelligence, and then retired to his room.

It was a relief to be able to move unrestrainedly, to toss himself about as he chose, and to move restlessly up and down the room like a wild beast freshly caged.

The approach of morning brings a chill to the watcher generally, but Edmond's blood moved with unnatural velocity, and his skin seemed to burn.

Rufus, in the meantime, stealthy and snake-like, crawled to his father's bedside. Mr. Helmingham slept, and his son, shading the candle with his hand, steadily regarded the sleeper, and saw, instead of the fixed yellow tint which had seemed to prognosticate coming death when he left him, that the circulation was going on well, and that the breathing was less laboured. He set down the light, and passed his finger gently down his father's arm; he felt a steadier pulse, indicating returning strength.

On a paper, in the handwriting of Edmond, he found an account of the incidents of the night,

and a notice of the time when the last dose of stimulant had been given.

“Accursed fool!” exclaimed Rufus, between his teeth; “he has saved him;” and he sat down with a white face to consider what was to be done.

“The pangs of despised love” had racked the mind of the elder brother during his watch. The younger son was placed in a situation requiring effort to preserve the life of his father, whilst he longed for that father’s death.

He had never loved Mr. Helmingham. Rufus was physically and mentally a coward. Whilst they were children, their father used to mount the boys, by turns, on his shoulders, and walk round the room, or up the staircase, with them in this position. Edmond, standing erect, one foot held by his father, and one small hand steadyng himself on Mr. Helmingham’s head, would hold up his other hand, and cry “God save the king!” whilst Rufus, cowering down with bent knees, clung ignominiously to his father’s coat collar.

There was a large staircase in the house they had inhabited before Abbotsbury had been left to their father, full of niches intended for statues,

but which were empty. The staircase was left unlighted, from motives of economy, for Mr. Helmingham had been a poor man before he succeeded to the Abbotsbury property.

It had been his sport to carry his boys on his shoulders, and deposit them in these niches, from which they could not descend, except at the risk of breaking their necks.

The situation had not been an agreeable one to the boys, left alone in darkness, and afraid of moving lest they should step over the narrow footing and fall.

On these occasions, Edmond generally contrived to sink into a sitting position, and was usually found, after the lapse of half an hour, kicking his heels defiantly against the wall in perfect silence; whilst his more timid brother made the house ring with his agonized screams, till the female servants rushed to soothe his cries with bits of sugar or pieces of cake.

Rufus was conscious of an amount of humiliation in the pity he received. His memory, with all connected with himself, was tenacious, and as he had hated his father for his cruel jokes when they were inflicted, he hated him now after

the lapse of twenty years in his recollection of them.

He thought of these things, when he sat by the side of the sick man. What would the dreams of the unconscious father have been could he have seen the malign expression in the beautiful face of his younger boy, as he rested his chin in his hand, and glared at the helpless form before him.

He looked at the rich furniture of the bedroom, all betokening wealth. His thoughts wandered over the broad and fertile acres of which he should be master, should Mr. Helmingham die now. He remembered only too clearly the amount of debts and liabilities, and a credit which could not much longer be bolstered up by promises and *post-obits*.

"If he dies now, I shall have it *all* legally—by his own will, unprompted by myself. I did not know it had been made in my favour. Why did he prefer me to my elder brother in this disposition of his property? Heaven knows! Probably, he thought Edmond likely to be an extravagant dog, and considered me rather more careful. I have taken care not to let him

know of all my embarrassments. These old fellows leave their money, not for love of their successors, but to that one amongst them who is likely to keep it well together. I am not grateful to him."

He sat there, wishing his father would die, with an indistinct idea that letting him sink for want of stimulants would not be killing him.

The half-hour came and passed and Rufus had not administered the prescribed dose. Another came, and the patient, turning uneasily, asked, in a faint voice, for brandy.

"It is not time yet, my dear father."

And Mr. Helmingham sighed, and slumbered again.

"He is weaker," thought Rufus; "his pulse flutters." And with this cheering idea he continued his watch.

"Water!" cried the sick man, and that Rufus administered tenderly and willingly. It would not aid the flickering light which was trying so feebly to burn.

The hours were flying fast. With daylight would come the steps of eager feet, inquiring news of the patient, and the nurse, revived into

interest and activity by her eight hours of rest, would resume her occupation.

"I *would* not kill him, yet I *could* easily ; but I would not. Yet I wish for his death. The wish is, according to Scripture, as damnable as the act."

And thus he meditated as the rushlight sunk down in the shade, flickering, and throwing weird-looking circles of light on the ceiling of different dimensions ; and the thoughts careering round the brain of the younger son stopped in one dark groove and settled into firmer purpose.

## CHAPTER X.

Let no man fear to die: we love to sleep all;  
And death is but the sounder sleep. All ages  
And all hours call us. "Tis so common, easy,  
That little children press their paths before us.

WHEN Edmond left the bedside of his step-mother, she had rejoiced over the favourable intelligence he had communicated, and settled her weary head to sleep; but, notwithstanding the renewed confidence in her husband's recovery produced by Edmond's report, she was conscious of an uneasy feeling at the idea that Rufus was the sole watcher by his father's bed.

This sensation, for which she could assign no reason, followed her into the realms of sleep, and tinged all its images with horror.

She knew not of the dispositions of her husband's property, nor of the temptation they offered to an unprincipled man to expedite the death which was to make him powerful and wealthy; but,

with a true woman's instinct, she was sure that Edmond could be trusted, and that Rufus was false.

She dreamed of a region of dim twilight, where, amongst giant fragments of rock, she was pursuing the form of her husband, who ever seemed in advance of her, and unconscious of her efforts to overtake him. The sea, unseen and more awful in the distant darkness, boomed its ceaseless waves against the unknown shore.

Presently, a third form was added to the scene, whose back was turned to her, and whose figure she could not recognise.

He followed the footsteps of her husband with threatening gestures, whilst the pursued was unconscious of the stealthy, noiseless steps of the pursuer.

Her husband stopped at length at the edge of the cliff which overhung the dark nameless sea, and seemed to shudder at its vicinity, when the dim figure stretched out both arms to push him from the steep.

With a loud cry Mrs. Helmingham awoke, with an exclamation of agony so shrill and intense, that her maid, who slept in her room,

started from sleep, and rushed to the bedside of her mistress.

"Go! go at once, and tell Captain Helmingham that his father is worse, and he must go to him directly."

The servant thinking that some one had brought intelligence, which she, being asleep, had not heard, threw on her dressing-gown, and conveyed the intelligence to Captain Helmingham, who rushed from his room in alarm.

He had not taken off his clothes; he had been too wretched to lie down quietly, and, believing, as did the servant, that his stepmother's information was well-grounded, he hastened to the sick-room with less caution than he generally observed.

Rufus was standing with his back to the door as Edmond entered, leaning over the bed; he turned and revealed a white scared face, from the distended eyelids and compressed white lips of which all beauty had vanished.

"Is he worse?" cried Edmond, hurriedly.

"Yes—I fear—he is," said Rufus, stammering.

Edmond leant over his father.

"Brandy, quick!" he exclaimed; and he

snatched the bottle from Rufus, who fumbled at the cork, and striking off the neck, poured out a tablespoonful without water, and placed it within the lips of the patient. His face was livid, and his breathing laboured.

“ How is this?—how did it happen? He was so much better when I left him. What have you done to him? ” were observations which the elder son precipitated one on another, without the slightest suspicion of the truth, and merely because from his hidden rage against Rufus he was glad of an excuse to quarrel with him. But the questions—

Words at random sent,  
Found mark the archer little meant.

And Rufus trembled as he replied that he could not be answerable for the change in his father; the seeming amendment had been illusory.

“ You have not given the brandy,” said Edmund.

He held the bottle to the light, and saw that it was undiminished.

“ I fear I dozed a little,” said the young man, looking very much ashamed; and the honest

sailor believed him, and felt sorry for the reproaches he had implied.

"He must be so ashamed of himself," thought Edmond ; "and I hope 'tis not too late. My father is recovering his right colour." Then turning to Rufus, he said more gently that he had better go to bed, as he meant himself to remain now till daylight.

Rufus, dismayed and disappointed, and not clear in his own mind as to the amount of suspicion which might dwell in his brother's mind, poured out and swallowed half-a-glass of the brandy of which he had deprived his father, and then sought forgetfulness of his troubles in sleep.

It could not be a tranquil repose, for he must be up again in a couple of hours to see the contents of the post-bag, lest it should contain some loving letter to Edmond from Cora, which might defeat all his schemes.

It requires the combination of many fine qualities to make a clever scoundrel. He must be at once prudent and daring, circumspect and impetuous, energetic, yet calm. He must be temperate, to keep his head clear enough for the working of mischief, and sufficiently ardent to

work with spirit. Just then Rufus would have wished for eight hours of quiet repose; but that luxury he could not allow himself.

There is great pleasure in the exercise of skill, and the idea that he should defraud Edmond of Cora's letter, should she have written one, made him lay his head on his pillow with a smile of satisfaction on his face.

## CHAPTER XI.

Faith, where art thou fled?  
Are all the vows and protestations dead?—  
The hands held up, the wishes and the heart,  
Is there not one remaining, not a part  
Of all these to be found? Why, then, I see  
Men never knew that virtue, constancy.

CORA, however, had no idea of writing to her lover before she heard from him. It is difficult for a girl to write her first love-letter even when she may be in the habit of epistolary correspondence, and in this custom Cora had never indulged, for she had lived in seclusion, and knew no friends, save her mother and her sister. As from these she had never been separated, she had had no occasion to write to them till her residence at Abbotsbury.

When Margaret met her, for twenty minutes' rest from the duties of nursing, in the room where they breakfasted, she was astonished to

see how very beautiful, how enriched in loveliness, her sister had become.

Mrs. Noble seemed to be a shade better, and this conviction in Cora's mind had allowed the secret happiness concealed in the depths of her heart to spread a glow of enchantment over her whole person.

Should she tell Margaret? She was not sure. She was diffident—yet it was a fact to be proud of; and she felt half inclined to confide in her sister. She had been absent from home, and in an incredibly short time she had won the love of a gallant and honourable man. But it was so delicious to keep the secret in her bosom that she hesitated, and Margaret, quite unconscious that there was anything to relate on her sister's part, began her recital of the little incidents of domestic life, in which she believed Cora must feel all her old interest.

Cora had need of all her secret enthusiasm when she heard the detail of small expenses, which were great grievances.

The dread lest Margaret should exceed her mother's income, on one hand, and the fear that the patient might suffer by the absence of

luxuries they were too poor to procure without going into debt.

"Oh, Cora! have you ever thought of what would become of us if poor mamma should die!" exclaimed Margaret.

"Oh, mamma will not die—she must not!" said Cora, impatiently. "And if she must die, some day perhaps I shall be married," she continued, flushing all over with a beautiful rose tint, "and then, Margaret, you shall live with me."

Margaret gave a half smile.

"First, you must find a man willing to marry you, and worthy of being your husband, and when that is accomplished, you must find a man willing to accept the encumbrance of an invalid sister-in-law."

"He would not be my husband if he loved you not!" said the girl, flushing now with indignation at the thought of the injustice Margaret did to a man of whose existence she was unaware. "Besides, I could go out as a companion as I am now situated, and I could give you half my salary. I really think you are in better health, Margaret. You could not sustain

the fatigue of nursing mamma, as you have done, unless you were stronger."

Thus she

Promised hope till sickness wore a smile,

and Margaret was cheered by the inestimable blessing of her sister's sympathy and active aid.

Cora could not hear from Abbotsbury for five days; for Edmond had to return home, and the post from his father's residence would be seventy-two hours before it could reach the small town of Trevedra.

As on a wintry day the traveller who has warmed himself thoroughly by a genial fire steps boldly into the chilling atmosphere, and defies its efforts to arrest the glowing circulation of his blood, but by degrees feels his pulses flag, his extremities become colder and colder, and his memory of past comfort more faithless and indistinct, thus Cora lost confidence by degrees as days dragged on, even before the post could have brought her a letter from her lover.

She had a presentiment she should not receive one on that morning, though Edmond had re-

iterated his promises that he would not fail to write. She told herself that she *must* hear from him, yet was answered by a voice from the depths of her heart that there would be no letter for her.

Notwithstanding this, she contrived to be disengaged from her mother's room, and lingering near the flower-clad porch of the cottage, to watch for the grim aspect of the woman who carried a primitive basket on her arm, with a leather covering to protect the correspondence of the town of Trevedra.

Cora felt very guilty when Mrs. Turner looked at her ; and she turned away under pretence of fastening into its place a restive branch of honeysuckle, not to appear too eager to know if the basket contained anything for her.

Mrs. Turner stopped deliberately before the house, and lifting the cover, sorted the letters, and then, nodding at Cora, said, "None for you, Miss," and walked off with a disdainful sniff.

Cora went into the house feeling very small, very depressed, very much ashamed of herself. She made up her mind that next day she would

remain concealed in the house, and not expose herself to the derision of the letter-carrier ; yet the following morning saw her in the same spot, to suffer similar disappointment.

Cora had faith in her lover's constancy and honesty, and a thousand fears possessed her as to his well-being. He might have had an accident—might be ill. The coach might have been upset. He might be lying unknown and insensible at a wayside inn.

On the continued disappointment of her hopes her looks faded and her spirits declined.

Margaret saw her anxiety about the post, and asked if she expected a letter from Mrs. Helmingham.

"No ; not from her ; she cannot write easily ; but I thought some one would have written to tell me about them."

Who comprised the "them" she did not particularize, nor did Margaret inquire.

On the fourth day Mrs. Turner referred to her basket, and brought from its recesses, not a letter, but a paper, addressed to Miss Cora Noble.

She looked at the address eagerly, and felt her heart flutter with the hope that Edmond had sent it; but her countenance fell when she saw "R. H." in the corner of the address. It was to Rufus she was indebted for this attention.

She sat down on the first chair she came to, and opened the newspaper. Perhaps it contained an account of the upset of the night-mail, and of Edmond's death. Her thoughts were of the gloomiest character now, and she fancied she was prepared for any misfortune.

It was the *Suffolk Gazette*, and contained an account of Mr. Helmingham's accident and hopeless state, drawn up and sent by Rufus to the county paper. He had indicated the paragraph by a cross. He meant to stand well with the young lady, and appear to her to be the only one of the family who remembered her existence.

Alas! for the selfishness of human nature. She had received from Mr. Helmingham small courtesies of life which altogether make up a large aggregate of kindness; yet the knowledge of his danger gave no feeling to Cora, but a

slight one of relief, as seeming at the first aspect of the intelligence to account in some degree for the silence of her lover.

No doubt he was much shocked, much occupied, and therefore he had not written. Yet her heart whispered that however grieved he might be, however engrossed by the painful nature of the circumstances by which he was surrounded, he might have found five minutes to write to her, had he wished to do so. This unworthy indifference to the sufferings of her former host, was succeeded by penitence as she thought of Mrs. Helmingham's helplessness and anxiety.

"I will go back as soon as mamma is better. She *is* better, I am sure. So soon as I can leave Margaret I will return to Abbotsbury:" and then she flushed at the conviction that she was impatient to return to the presence of Edmund, and that it was but self-deception to attribute her anxiety to get back to the desire of alleviating the distress of her patroness.

To this lady she now wrote, expressing her regret for the accident, of which she had seen the account in the paper, and begging that Mrs. Helmingham would direct her maid to write a

few lines of information as to Mr. Helmingham's state, and her own health.

"I shall certainly hear something thus," said Cora to herself.

She felt very guilty when she dropt the unpaid letter in the post-office. It was ever a moot point in those days, whether or not to pay the postage. If the writer of the letter were timid, and feared it might be unwelcome, and especially if the unfortunate scribe were poor, as a rule he paid it. The wealthy scorned such delicate punctilioes, and made the recipients of their favours pay for the honour of receiving them sometimes recklessly, adding an extra half-sheet, which doubled the postage.

But Cora had no money to spare; and remembering how kind and liberal was Mrs. Helmingham, she sent her letter unpaid, though she blushed at so doing.

She wondered if she should have a letter by the return of the post—that would be in five days' time. Her memory carried her back to Mrs. Helmingham's sick-room, and she speculated when she would get the letter, and whether she would ask the maid to write, as Cora had

humblly suggested, or if one of the young men would be commissioned by their stepmother to perform this little act of civility. Five or six days to wait! What an eternity it seemed to the hot, impatient heart of youth!

In the meantime Rufus was thrown out of his calculations by Cora's not writing to Edmond. It was a degree of shyness and delicacy on which he had not calculated.

He wanted the cover with the postmark of the town of Trevedra. The rest he could forge; but the cover was beyond him—a cover addressed to Captain Helmingham. Rufus took care to carry Cora's letter himself to Mrs. Helmingham, and she, as he had anticipated, asked him to open and read it.

"A charming little letter, my dear mother. Do you wish your maid to answer it; or will you give me the agreeable commission?"

"Answer it yourself, if you will kindly do so. You can tell her how anxious and distressed we have been; and pray say how much I have missed her society, and how glad I shall be when Mrs. Noble's restored health will permit her to return to Abbotsbury."

Rufus left his stepmother to comply with her wishes. He had thought of a means of getting a letter addressed to Edmond. He had observed on one occasion that his brother had given Cora a copy of verses, which she had carried at once to her bedroom. She had been detained so long that she had but a short time to dress; and Rufus, who was curious to read them, speculated on her leaving them in the pocket of her morning dress when she exchanged it for an evening one.

During dinner he exclaimed that he had left his pocket-handkerchief in the drawing-room, and quitted the table to fetch it. A few moments of absence put him in possession of the tenor of the verses, and he returned to his place with an innocent self-satisfied air.

They were as follows:—

#### EDMOND'S VERSES.

My heart was like an empty bower,  
So cold and tenantless and dark:  
Without the walls there clung no flower,  
Upon the hearth there glowed no spark.

A tenant came one summer's day,  
The halls were filled with song and shout,  
And sweet thoughts with exulting play,  
Like children's feet went in and out.

And though cold skies and drizzly rain,  
With leaden stillness filled the air ;  
Or drifting clouds heaven's face might stain,  
Within that house all things seemed fair.

O lovely tenant ! leave me never,  
The flowers would quit the tottering wall,  
And like the heart deserted ever  
Dark, silent, drear, the house would fall.

## CHAPTER XII.

Marry, this is minching Mallecho ; it means mischief.

THE note of Rufus was as follows :—

“ Abbotsbury, Sept. 18.—

“ DEAR MISS CORA NOBLE,—I was so fortunate as to be with Mrs. Helmingham when the servant brought the letters this morning, and I eagerly seized the opportunity this circumstance afforded me to petition for the pleasure of replying to your kind inquiries after my father’s health.

“ Knowing the interest your kind heart feels in the happiness of my stepmother, I sent the paper, that you might know of the occupation of our time and thoughts, and of the anxiety which we all must suffer till my dear father is pronounced out of danger. His state is still very precarious, and as my mother is deprived of my brother’s company and my own whilst

we linger by the bedside of the patient, she has written to invite a young lady, a distant connection of her own, to occupy your place by her couch, as she fears it may yet be sometime ere you will be able to leave the duties you perform in a manner so exemplary by Mrs. Noble's sick bed.

"My elder brother, hearing that I was about to write to you, requested me to ask you to return to him a copy of verses which he once gave you, in four stanzas, beginning

'My heart was like an empty bower.'

If that be the state of Edmond's heart, I do not think it will be so long, for he is much struck by, and very enthusiastic in praise of, his cousin, Miss Lola Louis, to whom my stepmother sent him, to try to persuade her to return with him to Abbotsbury. She was then unable to accompany him, but they have appointed an early day when he is to proceed to her guardian's residence, and bring her to our house.

"Miss Louis inherits a fine fortune, and would be a desirable match for my elder brother,

though quite beyond the reach of a poor fellow like myself.

“ Pardon me for enlarging on family matters to you, which I fear can afford you but little interest, but having seen you domesticated in our circle, I write as to an old friend, and solicit your excuse if I am prolix.

“ The ferns we collected in that delightful morning ramble are doing exceedingly well. In the presence of the threatenings of death, their fresh young leaves look like a sad mockery.

“ Pray take pity on me, and write me a few lines when you have time. A letter from you —a letter which is neither a bill nor from a dun—will relieve the monotony of my watchings by my poor father’s bedside.

“ Believe me ever,

“ Yours most sincerely,

“ RUFUS HELMINGHAM.”

Cora’s long watches for a letter were at length rewarded. She saw from an opening in the curtains of her mother’s darkened room Mrs. Turner on the opposite side of the way, stopping at the door of a house to deliver the post, and

Cora stole down on tiptoe to take her chance at the porch, telling Margaret, whom she passed on the stairs, that she feared if the post-woman should knock she might startle Mrs. Noble.

Margaret sighed! She was accustomed now to Cora's varying humour, as it was influenced by the hour for the delivery of letters. She had seen the flush of hope and expectation on Cora's eager face, and an impatience of any observation—or accidental sound which might interfere with those which indicated Mrs. Turner's coming. Cora was accustomed to turn white and red by turns when she compelled herself to sit still, and did not rush to the door to learn her fate at once.

If the post-woman passed on, Cora's depression became extreme, till the following day saw a return of restless hope in her looks and movements.

On this occasion she was not to be disappointed; she had news of some kind certainly from Abbotsbury. It seemed to her in the handwriting of Edmond, and she was going to tear it open, when the sour post-woman exclaimed sharply,—

"One shilling and tenpence, double letter, if you please, Miss!"

Irritated and impatient, Cora searched in her pocket, and could find only a shilling and a sixpence; she turned away to look for the other fourpence, carrying the letter, when Mrs. Turner exclaimed—

"No trust; I should never get paid if folks knew first what was in their letters," and throwing the coveted epistle back in the basket, Cora sought her sister to borrow the money from the household expenses.

Margaret gave it willingly, gladly. She was so pleased that Cora should have the pleasure for which she had yearned so eagerly, and she had a transient hope that Cora would confide some of the contents to herself, that she might judge of the amount of and cause for anxiety, which she perceived was wearing away the sweet look of youth and contentment from her sister's face; but happiness in love needs no sympathy, and Cora passed through the house and retired to the garden, where, at its very extremity, there was an arbour, the entrance to which was almost impassable, from the long tendrils of clematis

and honeysuckle which depended from its roof.

Here it was that Cora read the cruel letter, which seemed to press the very life from out her heart.

She was exceedingly pale when she had finished it.

"It is an insult ; an insult !" she continued to repeat. "What right has Captain Helmingham to insult me, by asking for his verses, without a single word to explain his silence. What do I care ? It is a matter of perfect indifference to me. It really makes me laugh," and she leant her head against the trellis-work of the arbour, and burst into a fit of hysterical sobbing. Then she wiped her eyes and read the letter again, to see if there were any meanings which had not at first impressed themselves on her mind.

No, alas ! It was all too plain ; Captain Helmingham had amused himself at her expense. He had taken advantage of her credulity to steal her heart, to caress her person. She flushed to the roots of her hair when she thought of the kisses he had impressed on her lips ; the warmth with which he had held her to his breast. Those

verses—he had been so reserved, seemingly, about giving them to her ; they seemed to be so sacred. She had considered them so, and yet he must have shown them to his brother Rufus ; they had no doubt laughed together at her credulity. Were the remarks about Miss Lola Louis dictated by a friendly spirit on the part of Rufus ? Did he mean to warn her that Captain Helmingham had other views, and that she must not expect any matrimonial alliance from either of the brothers ? She did not know, she thought that she did not care.

Then another conviction stole slowly over her mind like the creeping cold of a frosty night. Mr. Rufus had indicated that her place was about to be supplied by another lady. This time a wealthy heiress and a relative. The complication of distresses was crushing. Her mother's illness made money so imperative, yet the means of getting it seemed snatched from her. She had counted so much on being a help at home, and on saving them the expense of keeping her, and now she had only made a failure.

Mrs. Helmingham would not care to receive her again, of course ; but this bitter thought was

whirled away in the storm of her shame and anguish at the conviction that she had been made a subject of ridicule to the brothers.

"Oh, dear! there is Margaret standing at the back door, looking for me. She would want to know the contents of the letter. There! she is calling. I am coming, dear, directly! How she worries me! Poor Margaret, she does not know how very miserable I am!"

She read the letter once more. Well, she must act on it. There would be some slight comfort in sending back the verses in a blank cover at once.

She would write a polite note to Mr. Rufus Helmingham, thanking him for the trouble he had taken in writing to her. Margaret might read his letter.

She would never confess to her wiser sister how she had been deceived and turned into ridicule. If her face retained traces of tears, the chance of losing a position so advantageous as that which she had filled at Abbotsbury would be a sufficient reason for their having been shed.

Her anxious sister walked up the path to meet  
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her as she returned to the house, and Cora felt irritated at the look of inquiry and pity in the eyes of her calmer relative.

"No bad news, I trust."

"Read, and judge for yourself," said Cora.

Margaret read the letter, and her face fell.

"Poor darling, it is enough to worry you ! But we will not meet evils half-way. This threatened young lady, it seems, is an heiress, and probably has been accustomed to exact attention instead of paying it to others. It is therefore unlikely she will become the constant attendant on an invalid. Again, your correspondent points to her possible marriage with Captain Helmingham, when of course she would have diverging interests and occupations which would, from duty as well as pleasure, separate her from his stepmother."

The result of Margaret's suggestions was that Cora's tears fell in plenteous showers down her flushed and discoloured cheeks; and, like a physician kept in ignorance by his patient of the true disease, the applications only aggravated the suffering they were intended to relieve.

" You will write a civil answer, I suppose," said Margaret, thinking wisely that occupation was the best cure for vexation.

" Yes, certainly. Oh ! about those verses Captain Helmingham wants to have returned ? They are of no consequence,—only about an empty house," said Cora, whom suffering had taught to be disingenuous.

" You had better send them back. I should think you had not need to pay the postage."

" Certainly not. Mr. Rufus Helmingham did not pay his double letter to me."

Cora went to the old bureau which used to be called hers, and sat down to write with a trembling hand, which she did the best she could to steady.

No ; they should not see how wretched they had made her. She took out the verses and read them again.

How she loved the hand that had traced those lines ! She loved it still ! She knew the poetry by heart, but her eyes lingered over it fondly !

Her hand shook a very little as she directed

the letter, and when Edmond's eyes dwelt on this cover he put down the emotion to conscious shame and guilt.

She sealed this, and then proceeded to address Mr. Rufus Helmingham in a few formal words of thanks. Should any unfavourable change take place in Mr. Helmingham's health, she hoped he would increase the obligation by informing her of it.

She spoilt several sheets before she finished,—so many, indeed, that Margaret came in wondering what had kept her so long, and remonstrated that writing-paper was fourteenpence per quire.

Cora was very sorry, but answered with some petulance that she did not write many letters, and might be forgiven such an abnormal extravagance. Certainly the child had grown much more cross and unmanageable since her visit to Abbotsbury.

It was some occupation to proceed to the post-office with these letters. She walked with quick steps to try to escape the whirl of miserable thoughts by which she was haunted.

"He *must* feel when he gets the letter with the verses only enclosed," she said to herself, in the desperate desire to provoke his sensibilities in some way—even to anger against herself.

She wanted him to suffer some of the mental anguish that racked her heart. She was nourishing an unconscious hope that something more would come of it,—it was quite impossible that it should be all over!

She could not go back yet to the house. She persuaded herself that she was not wanted. Had she been happy she would have lingered round her mother's bedside, but she dared not compel herself to inactivity in that peaceful chamber.

As a mad dog feels the necessity of ceaseless exercise, Cora felt as if she should be suffocated if she were shut up in a close room, with only the tiptoe movements consonant to the comfort of an invalid.

She walked as if her happiness could be attained by speed, past the church which was buried in the surrounding houses of the small town, when she had dropped her letters into the

post-office, up the hill skirting the last of the poor dwellings, towards a village church and rustic graveyard about two miles distance from her home.

She opened the gate into the churchyard, and sat down behind one of the tombs—there she should be undisturbed she knew, for twilight was hastening on, and the villagers had a superstitious dread of the locality. She leaned her hot face against the stone, and tried to think quietly.

One feeling was ever in her heart — a yearning love for the man who cared not for her.

In that dreary spot, where all spoke of rest after toil and pain ended, she was wrestling with the passion of her young untamed heart. She could not hate the man whom she believed had deceived and ridiculed her.

“Oh ! I do so love him. I do so love him !” she cried aloud to the silent air. I want to see him—I must—I must see him again. I must hold his hand, just a minute. I know he did love me once. He may love me once more. I would rather be dead—dead !”

she exclaimed, striking her forehead against the tombstones ; " like the girl who lies here, than feel that I should never see him again."

The last rays of the evening sun sank lower and lower, when she heard, borne on the evening air, the hymn for the dead, sung by the bearers of a corpse which they were bringing for interment—

Christians ! wherefore are ye weeping ?  
Rest must come to all at night ;  
No desire disturbs the sleeping,  
Sorrows fade in morning's light.

Shame no more his cheek is flushing,  
From his breast is anger fled,  
From those eyes no tears are gushing,  
Father ! blessed are the dead !

The monotonous tones of the singers, and the signification of the words, soothed Cora in spite of herself. What could her grief matter when it must be so short even at the longest ! Let Edmond marry and be happy. Joy and grief, after their short performance on life's stage, must end here.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, twisting her fingers together in her anguish, "but why should I have been tormented with a glimpse of happiness, to be left for ever lamenting?"

The hymn had ceased, and the sonorous voice of the clergyman preceding the corpse to the grave with solemn and majestic tread was heard—

"Hear my prayer, O Lord! Consider my calling. Hold not thy peace at my tears. We bring our days to an end, even as a tale that is told."

Cora could hear the convulsive sobs of the mourners, who stood round the grave; and she shuddered as the earth fell on the coffin-lid.

She thought of her mother, and how nearly that beloved parent had approached the portals of death. Was she deficient in natural affection, that the image of that peril made so little impression on her preoccupied heart?

"Oh mother! forgive your child," she said, rising.

She was full of remorseful tenderness towards her; she would hasten home, and try to be more

kind, more devoted than she had ever been before.

Suppose the Almighty should punish her by taking from her the life of one who she had not half-valued since this mad passion had possessed her. She trembled at the thought and quickened her pace.

"How is mamma?" she said, breathlessly, to the old servant.

"Much the same, Miss; but Miss Margaret has been breaking her heart about you—she is up in Missusses room, giving her her tea."

Cora replaced her bonnet and shawl, and stole into her mother's room very softly, as if she had been in the house sometime.

Margaret gave her a look of intense relief, which went to Cora's heart, for her quiet step had not been heard by her elder sister.

Mrs. Noble was lying supported by pillows, and gave a glance of welcome to her beautiful child, passing her attenuated fingers over the hairs that shone like burnished gold.

"My darling, I shall not want either of you to-night. I feel quite comfortable. Old

Betty can sleep on the sofa." An arrangement which was carried out; and Cora, overwhelmed by bodily fatigue and mental anguish, at length slept heavily.

## CHAPTER XIII.

The seamen rejoice in the play of the balls,  
Though the chain and the grapeshot lie splintering  
around,  
With the blood of our messmates though slippery the  
ground ;  
The fiercer the fight, still the fiercer we grow,  
We heed not our loss, so we conquer the foe.

SOUTHEY.

Rurus's heart was light on the morning when he took from the bag the letter for Edmond, and one for himself. He had to be speedy in his movements ; and in anticipation of the arrival of the enclosure for Edmond, he had taken Cora's book for some words to copy the sentence which was all that Edmond had requested as an answer, — “ It is true.”

Any handwriting can be successfully forged if you have the power of tracing the words.

In a very successful forgery, which imposed on legal authorities, experts decided it to be a

forgery, because, though every word resembled the handwriting of the testator, the words were of different sizes, having been copied from writing executed at different periods.

Rufus had considered himself particularly fortunate in finding the three consecutive words he wanted in Cora's book of transcribed poetry. The verses ran thus—

It is true that I loved you in days that are past,  
Could you deem such delightful illusions would last?  
'Twas the tint of the rainbow in turbulent weather,  
When thunder from storm-clouds was crashing together.  
Then, though tears fell like showers, there was sunshine  
above,  
Life's morning sun shining through hope and through  
love.

But the midday of manhood brought labour and toil;  
Soft scenes were forgot in the battle's turmoil.  
Had dozens of rainbows been shining around,  
No glance had they won from that care-cumber'd  
ground.  
Then blame me not, dear, for the love that is past,  
Nor deem that illusions so transient could last.

He took a half-sheet of letter-paper, and traced the words carefully with a hard pencil, and then went over them as carefully with ink.

The sheet of paper containing the verses made

a double letter, and the half-sheet he enclosed with the forged words made equal weight.

He had hardly dropped it back into the letter-bag, with the one addressed to himself, when he heard the hurried steps of his brother approaching, and he glided gently out of the room.

He knew that the sight of Cora's writing addressed to himself would drive Edmond frantic; but he had such reliance on his brother's honour, that, though his happiness, or even his life, had depended on his knowing its contents, he knew he would not tamper with it.

"Poor fellow, he's such a fool!" was the mental comment made by Rufus on his brother's scruples.

Presently he heard a quick step leave the breakfast-table. Edmond rushed past the windows of the room to which Rufus retreated, without his hat, and with evident marks of disorder in his gait, and suffering on his brow.

"*Habet!*" said Rufus, sweetly; and with a contented mind he returned to the breakfast-table.

The post-bag was overset, the letters partly on the table, partly on the carpet.

"Really, really, I consider such violence quite below the dignity of a reasonable man," said Rufus, picking up the letters lazily. "Now, Miss Cora, let me see what you have to say to me. Umph, umph! Very proper and well expressed, but scarcely warm enough to do me much good. You will have to appear much more loving, my charming young lady, before this meets the eye of that maniacal brother of mine."

He withdrew to his room, and added above the signature, "Ever your devoted," from words taken singly from Cora's manuscript book.

They did not fit very well in size, but an angry or jealous man is seldom critical. His judgment is in abeyance, when his passions are alert.

Rufus burnt the remainder of the letter, allowing the flame to leave partly untouched "Ever your devoted, Cora Noble."

He flung this open inside the fender, justly judging that Edmond's restless steps would bring him shortly back to his starting-point.

Rufus resembled the poisoner who, having administered one dose, hastens to repeat it, lest the

patient should rally ; but he needed not have feared ; the words read by Edmond, as the answer from Cora, had stunned him too much to admit of recovery. Whilst the child Hope was yet alive, he prayed and wept ; but when Hope expired, his mind was too manly to cherish the corpse. He dismissed it, as far as he could, from his memory. He supposed it had been presumptuous to think that one so deficient in Nature's graces could ever attract the love of a beautiful maiden. Well, he would go back to sea. He would write to the Admiralty for employment. The world should not stand still with him, because he was jilted.

When he returned to the breakfast-room, he saw the remains of Cora's letter inside the fender. Rufus had stated it was not his intention to marry Miss Cora Noble. How then ? Did he mean to seduce her ? His face burnt with indignation at the thought. Yet how could he act ? Would not any interference be put down as the malice and rage of a disappointed lover ? He would not trust himself to write or speak on the subject.

Edmond sought the physician when he left Mr. Helmingham's room.

“ You find my father better ?”

“ Certainly ; much better.”

“ Out of danger ?”

“ Well—yes ; unless anything occurred to agitate or annoy him.”

“ And this might have a malign influence ?”

“ Yes, it might.”

“ It is desirable that I should return to my profession so soon as I can. May I do so ?”

“ You are the best judge as to whether Mr. Helmingham is likely to disapprove of your absence. I would not irritate or vex him were I in your place.”

“ I do not think he will care,” said Edmond, with a half sigh, feeling that no one did care for him.

“ He seems particularly well and cheerful this morning, and we have permitted him to read the letters which arrived during his illness. I suppose they will not worry him ?”

“ Certainly not, I should imagine. My father has very few subjects of anxiety now.”

Mr. Helmingham’s bell rang, and shortly after there was a message from his father to Edmond,

that he wished for his attendance by his bedside.

Edmond obeyed, and found him, supported by pillows, with a benign air turning over a heap of freshly-opened letters.

The aspect of affairs seemed propitious, and Edmond abruptly entered on the subject nearest his heart.

"I am very happy to see you so much better, sir: it enables me to return to the duties of my profession with a tranquil mind."

"Must you really go to sea again?"

"It is my profession, sir; and" (with a forced smile) "we poor Jacks all hope to die admirals, if not K.C.B.'s, you know. Honours do not grow on hedges: if they did, they would be like blackberries, scarcely worth the plucking."

"Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them," said Mr. Helmingham, smiling.

"As I was not born great," replied Edmond, "and am not likely to have greatness thrust upon me, I must leave England to achieve it."

"I am not sure<sup>1</sup> of that. There is greatness to be achieved in the senate as well as on the ocean."

"I am not eloquent, sir : Rufus is. Return him for a rotten borough, if it please you. 'Deeds, not words,' is my motto. Thoughts are the children of men, but deeds are the attributes of the gods!"

It is worthy of observation that a man's judgment and sympathy depends on the number of years he has lived. Twenty years before, Mr. Helmingham would have felt his heart glow at the spirit and energy of his eldest son. Now he wished sincerely that Edmond had more prudence and discretion.

"Read this letter. No—stop ! take this key, and go to the drawer of my bureau next to the door ; open it—it is the second from the top—and you will see a sheet of parchment. Bring it to me."

Edmond obeyed, and gave into his father's hands the will which had so excited the cupidity of his brother.

"Throw it into the fire."

Edmond did so ; and father and son saw it

shrivelling up into fantastic fragments, and then remain blackened and illegible.

"Now for the letter."

Edmond read it quietly, and his face beamed.

"God bless you in your new dignity! Long may you live to enjoy it, my father!"

"I suspect, my son, I should not have been living to enjoy it at the present time but for your care and nursing. Sick folks observe much when they are supposed to be insensible, and I remember a marvellously unsatisfied longing for brandy, one night, which I am sure I required, but did not obtain, till I felt your hand putting the fluid to my lips; and your arm under my head."

"Ah! I fear poor Rufus slept, on that occasion."

"Did he?" exclaimed Lord Helmingham, drily. "I don't think he did. But now about your going to sea again. Here is the greatness thrust upon you, which you must inherit at my death."

"Father! I have but five months to conclude the term of service which will entitle me to be-

come an admiral in rotation. Let me do this, and then, should you still wish it, I will return home and spend my time in doing what I can to contribute to your comfort."

"So let it be, my son," agreed Lord Helmingham. "And now go to Lady Helmingham, and kiss her hand, and be the first to salute her by her new title."

It would be giving my hero credit for an amount of philosophy very unusual in this world were I to say that he was unmoved, even in the midst of his grief and anger at Cora's deceit and inconstancy, at the prospect of inheriting a peerage and a large fortune; but could he have had his choice, whether to be a peer in prospect, or the happy husband of Cora, freed from every suspicion of her truth and purity, he would not have hesitated a moment in choosing the latter.

Rufus came up and congratulated him with such seeming cordiality, and appeared to accept his fate with such smiling philosophy, that Edmond's honest heart felt remorse for the ill-feeling to which his rivalry in Cora's affections had given rise.

"I must work harder at the bar than I had anticipated," Rufus said, cheerfully. "Who knows! — I may sit on the woolsack some day, and patronize my countrified brother, who will spend his time amongst the Suffolk calves, and give laws anent pigs and poultry."

"Do not depreciate a position which you may have to fill," said Edmond. "To speak at public meetings, to be chairman of the bench of magistrates, and decide whether Tom's wife stole a lapful of turnips from Dick's farm, and what fitting punishment shall be awarded thereon; or to present a new hat or a pair of corduroys to the worthy cottager who shall have provided the country with the largest number of boys needed as food for powder for the Peninsular war. *I* am going where glory waits me, or death, it may be! but you will be quite welcome to all I leave behind," concluded Edmond, with an unusual tone of acrimony in the last phrase of the sentence, which Rufus perfectly understood. "My father! Heaven bless him!" resumed Edmond, "lives, a prosperous gentleman, and may outlive us both. As far as I am concerned I

should rejoice at this, both for his sake and my own,"—and he abruptly left the room, finding his memory rather importunate on unpleasant subjects.

## CHAPTER XIV.

Domum mansit. Lanam fecit.

IN the meantime Cora spent her time by the side of her mother's bed. That energetic widow, so soon as she could sit up in a slanting position, asked for her knitting, to go on with a coverlid she had begun to make before her illness. It was of white lamb's-wool, knitted in different patterns of squares, and sewn together. It was finished, excepting the border which occupied the skeleton-looking but still nimble fingers of the invalid, who was weaving unconsciously the thread of her daughter's fate.

Cora was penitent at the little she did to amuse her mother, and after admiring the evenness and skill of the work, she professed great interest in learning its destination.

"I suppose you will keep it for yourself, mamma?"

"Oh no ! my dear. It will be too handsome. You have no idea how much I have paid for the lamb's-wool."

"Yes ; I daresay it is very dear," rejoined Cora, concealing a yawn ; "but I don't know who is so worthy of it as the maker."

"I will give it to you when you marry a man with plenty of money, and are a great lady," said Mrs. Noble, smiling.

"In that case I fear, if it is to depend on such circumstances, I shall never have it ; but I do so wish——" said Cora, with a sudden thought.

"What would you so wish?"

"I mean," said Cora, who was more eager than grammatical, "that I wish you would send it to Mrs. Helmingham. Her feet are always kept warm artificially, and this would make such a delicious rug to throw over them."

Mrs. Noble pondered. Poverty stood, as usual, "the lion in the path" of anything the Nobles desired to do.

"The wretched thing has been no end of expense to me already. I never ought to have begun it," said Mrs. Noble, conscious that she was possessed by a restless spirit of activity

which tempted her into expenses which, though they would have seemed very small to others, were too great for her own limited means, "There is the carriage of it to pay, if we send it; if we don't pay for the carriage, it will not be polite or just to make Mrs. Helmingham pay for what she may not care to have. But you can carry it when you return," she continued, unconscious of the unpropitious letter, which seemed to make Cora's return doubtful.

"I think it would be better to send it, if we could manage it," said Cora, rather crestfallen. "I wonder how much the carriage would be by coach."

In the evening Mr. Thomas Bowles called to inquire after the patient, and heard of Cora's dilemma about the parcel.

"'Tis very light," he said, weighing it in his hand.

"Yes, that is its chief beauty," said Cora, indignantly.

"I was thinking of the price of the carriage," rejoined her old friend. "One of my clerks is going to London to-morrow—no, to-night—by the mail; he shall pay it down from thence to

Abbotsbury, which will not be more than a few pence. I will settle that, if Cora will write a pretty note in her best hand to Mrs. Helmingham, to beg her acceptance of Mrs. Noble's handiwork."

"How very kind and good you are!" said Margaret, impulsively.

And the bachelor's face crimsoned with pleasure at praise from her lips.

"Ah! by-the-bye, you must not address your friend as Mr. Helmingham, Cora. I see by the *Courier* that Mr. Helmingham is raised to the peerage by the title of Baron Helmingham of Abbotsbury. Let me see. He has a son, I believe?"

"Yes," said Cora, flushing and turning pale; "he has two sons."

"Ah! a good thing for the eldest. What is he by profession—a lawyer?"

"No, the eldest is a sailor."

"Well, he will give up the sea now, I suppose. A fellow does not generally care to run the risk of being shot through the head when his life becomes so valuable to himself. 'Tis those who have all to gain and nothing to

lose who make the best men to scale a town wall on a forlorn hope, or to board the enemy's vessel."

Cora slunk away to the darkest part of the room, conscious that she could not command the colour to return to her pallid cheeks.

"Miss Cora, mind you write that note, and do up your parcel, and I will take it with me, to save you the trouble of sending it to my house."

Cora, thus urged, went to her room, and with a trembling hand wrote the following note:—

"Trevedra.

"MY DEAR LADY HELMINGHAM,—My mother begs me to request your acceptance of the accompanying rug for your feet. I congratulate you and Lord Helmingham on his accession to the peerage. It seems to me that a fresh creation must be most agreeable to the possessor, as being unmixed with the thought of death. Dear Lady Helmingham, my mother is sufficiently well to admit of my leaving her, and I pine to return to you, if you will

permit me to do so. Pray ask your maid to answer me. I had much rather you had not the fatigue of writing.

"Your grateful and affectionate

"CORA NOBLE."

Cora thought this a very clumsy performance, but there was no time to re-write it, so she did it up carefully with the rug, and addressed it to Lady Helmingham.

"Do you think the family can have known of this long?" said she, addressing Mr. Thomas Bowles.

"I really can't say: probably for a week or so, because I don't imagine it found its way into the public papers immediately."

Cora having retired to her room, speculated what effect the fact of his future peerage had had on her former lover. She fancied that she saw it all. His coming greatness had made a match with her incongruous. She was thrown over because he was to become powerful and wealthy. "Oh, yes! 'tis quite clear now!" and though memories of his honest eyes rebuked her conviction, it seemed too probable that such

was the case. She would forget him. In fact, she never cared to see him again, nor to hear his name mentioned. She did not love at all a man who could be so base, so degraded; and then she buried her face on her outstretched arms, and, bursting into tears, wept till she was tired.

She loved as much as ever. She longed to see him once more—"only once!" she repeated to herself—once to look into his eyes, and to feel the pressure of his hand, in the ordinary greeting of acquaintances. She wondered if Lady Helmingham would accept her offered return. There must be five restless days to pass even if the maid wrote by the return of the post.

In the meantime, Mrs. Noble gained strength rapidly; and kind Mr. Thomas Bowles sent small delicacies to tempt her appetite, which pleased the dutiful Margaret, who knew that her mother required such, but would not permit their purchase.

The day at length arrived when it was just possible that Cora might hear from Abbotsbury, and she set herself to watch at the window for

the approach of the post-woman. She stopped at the door, and began her provoking inspection of the basket. At length, she produced a paid letter for Cora—oh, joy! it had the post-mark of Ipswich.

The handwriting was round and cramped, but Cora cared not for that; she tore open the wafered sheet, and read the following communication,—

“MADAM,—My lady begs me to say she is much obliged for the beautiful rug, and will be happy to see you as soon as you can leave home conveniently. Please to let my lady know the day and hour when you will reach Ipswich.

“Your obedient servant,

“JANE HALLIDAY.”

The expectation of returning to the house which contained her former lover made Cora's heart bound high with hope. She was impatient to get there. She would have preferred to start immediately. She stopped an instant with a cold chill of doubt. Was it not indelicate and unfeminine to return to the domicile of the

man who had treated her with neglect so marked?

She did not know; in her mad passion she felt as if she did not care. She was so glad she had told Margaret and her mother nothing of the past love, the present neglect. They never would have permitted her return to Abbotsbury; but Hope whispered clearly in the girl's heart, "See him; have some explanation. Hear what he has to say. He may account satisfactorily for his conduct."

She went to her purse and counted her money.

She had enough to pay her coach fare back, if they sent for her to Ipswich.

She went with the letter to her mother, who was pleased at the joy leaping from Cora's face, though there was a pang at Mrs. Noble's heart to see how the young girl yearned for other scenes than those of her own home. A mother's love is most unselfish, yet even mothers experience some slight heartache when thus they are forgotten by the young runners in the race of life. Those fleet-footed, bright-eyed creatures intent on *their* goal of happiness, neglect, if

they do not push aside the spectators who press on them with looks of eager sympathy and offers of help.

Once I stood, during the Crimean war, within the arch at the Horseguards. A regiment was being inspected before going to Sevastopol, and I looked with admiration at the magnificent assemblage of men, most of them under twenty-five years, fully armed and accoutred, and well-mounted. My heart swelled with pride and elation ; but as I moved aside I saw a veteran of seventy winters, on crutches, with withered face, sunken eyes, and toothless jaws, looking sadly at the gay cavalcade. On his breast was the Waterloo medal. All his thoughts went onwards with them ; but which of them thought of the shrivelled representative of past power, and pomp and glory ? None. Not even the grandson, to see whom for the last time the old man had hobbled from his cellar in the outskirts of Bermondsey.

Cora knew she was deficient in the love she ought to be feeling towards her mother ; she felt that if she could get over this terrible anxiety, this absorbing uncertainty, she could

return and devote herself to Mrs. Noble and to Margaret for the rest of her life.

"Mamma! you will forgive my wanting to leave you so soon?" But she could not tell the cause of her restless desire to leave home. Could she have done so, Mrs. Noble would not have felt so crushed as she did by Cora's seeming heartlessness and reticence.

She spoke to Margaret when they were alone.

"Has Cora told you anything? She seems unusually occupied and distraught. I do not want you to break any confidence, but I am a little grieved at her preoccupation and her evident desire to leave us. Perhaps the luxuries of Abbotsbury are attractive to the young girl."

"Oh mother! do not say so. I am sure she is content with bread and water here. I do not know why she wishes to go, but it may be a sufficient reason that she knows we are poor, and that she must be a burthen to us, whilst at Abbotsbury she earns the means of bestowing comforts on us at home."

So spoke Margaret, always anxious to make her sister's conduct appear in the brightest light,

though she had been as depressed and disheartened as was Mrs. Noble by Cora's reserve ; and if the mother was not convinced, she was for the time silenced.

It was lucky that Cora's proposition to return had been conveyed in a parcel, otherwise it would never have reached its destination. Rufus, whose plans of keeping up an estrangement between the lovers would have been frustrated probably by their meeting and having an explanation, would have suppressed the letter, and Cora would have been wounded and discouraged by the silence which followed the receipt of her mother's gift. He saw her letter to Lady Helmingham, announcing her return, and suppressed it.

Edmond was every day expecting an order to join the ship to the command of which he had been appointed. Did he know of Cora's advent, he would probably prolong his stay in the hope of seeing her again.

The idea of Cora's returning was very distasteful to Rufus. Had Edmond been safely in the Channel, his younger brother would have enjoyed the vicinity of a young and beautiful

girl, but as it was he wished her at the bottom of the lake. Her arrival was not to take place for a few days, for Mrs. Noble would not allow her to travel alone, and hoped for an escort in a townswoman about to proceed as far as London in a week's space. Something might happen in the meantime, if nothing was said about her coming, to take Edmond from Abbotsbury, and it might be supposed that the letter had miscarried, whilst the worst that could happen by Lady Helmingham's not receiving the letter would be the necessity of Cora's hiring a post-chaise.

Cora would reach Ipswich at night, and expect to meet the carriage there ; not finding it, she would probably wait a little, expecting some accident might have made it late ; then would be persuaded to sleep at the hotel, for the way was long and the night would be dark. This would suit Rufus exceedingly well.

When the evening arrived, he said he had an engagement which would take him from home for the night, with an air of mystery and importance which produced a feeble curiosity in the mind of his stepmother, who wondered what

Rufus was going to do, and then forgot him.

Edmond was too sad to notice his absence, excepting with a feeling of vexation that he should have to exert himself more than usual to entertain the beautiful guest who had arrived to occupy Cora's place with Lady Helmingham.

Miss Lola Louis, was a lady who once seen could never be forgotten, such was her soft, luxurious loveliness ; tall and brown, with rounded limbs, small nose, broad forehead, long sleepy black eyes, and dimpling cheeks and chin ; every movement of her features gave an added grace and beauty to the contour of her face. Her eyes were of a bluish tinge in the white part, and the lids fringed with long black lashes ; her shoulders were low and dimpled ; her fingers soft, round, and dimpled also—she amused herself in bending them backwards and forwards with a pliant grace unattainable to any except those born under a tropical sun, and descended from races of the East. Her hair was black and silky, but not abundant. Her temper sweet, and her disposition indolent.

She was a beautiful creature, fit only to be petted and worshipped by mankind ; and her wealth relieved her from any necessity for exertion. She could play an accompaniment languidly on the piano, to a delicious low contralto voice, which seemed incapable of any celerity of movement, but was unspeakably charming when heard in a summer twilight, when the setting sun had left a golden glow in the western horizon.

The mind made turbid by passion is incapable of reflecting any image, however attractive. Had the heart of Edmond been vacant, he must therein have enshrined an image so fair ; but the pure-looking, helpful, active Cora allowed of no present successor. Edmond looked at Lola Louis, and having asked himself if he could love her, turned himself away with a kind of loathing at the supposition. Lola knew but little of her relative, Lady Helmingham, but she sat smiling sweetly by her side, and extended in an easy chair, with her satin-cased feet resting on a footstool, and listened to the observations made by the eager invalid, who chafed at the helplessness entailed on her by her deprivation of movement.

Lady Helmingham admired beauty, and was never tired of observing that of Miss Louis. With the help of the young lady's maid, and of her own, endless combinations of female adornment were experimentalized upon; and her ladyship forgot Cora in her new toy, which, like a doll, she delighted to dress and re-dress,—

Kindling her beauty,

and by judicious stratagems concealing the ravage of time in her own person.

Weary and way-worn from being shut up many hours in a coach, where every inch was of importance, with her head aching, and feeling half suffocated from want of air, Cora got out of the coach at Ipswich, at half-past ten at night.

She had asked to have the carriage to meet her if quite convenient, but though she had received no answer to this letter which Rufus had intercepted, she was too impatient to wait, and determined to risk not being met. Probably Lady Helmingham would send a conveyance, though she had not desired her maid to say so.

When Cora stepped from the carriage, she

saw Rufus standing there, who gave a well-acted start of surprise, as he came forward to greet her.

“Is the carriage here?”

“My father’s carriage? No; did you expect it? I don’t think any one knew of your coming.”

“I wrote to say I was coming,” said Cora, much mortified and perplexed, for she had given the guard her last shilling, and had fully expected to be relieved from all money difficulties as soon as she got within the magic circle of the Abbotsbury wealth.

“What can I do?” she exclaimed, more to herself than to Rufus.

The night was pitch dark and raining, and a storm of wind and rain drove her back from the door of the hotel, when she looked out with an idea of walking.

“Pray come in, Miss!” said the chambermaid, “you will be quite wet in no time, if you stand there.”

“Can I be of any use to you?” said Rufus, sweetly. “Shall I order a bed to be prepared for you, and some tea? A private room and a fire,” he

cried to one of the waiters, and he was conducted to a small parlour, in which the late occupant had left one burning. "You seem very tired," he continued. "Tea and eggs for two," he ordered, as the waiter was lighting the candles.

"Oh! I don't want any," cried poor Cora, thinking of her empty purse.

"You really must allow me to judge for you on this occasion. Will you sleep here to-night, or shall I try to get post-horses for you to go on to Abbotsbury at once."

It was a choice of evils to Cora, who knew she had not the means of paying for her post-horses, nor for her entertainment at the hotel.

"And you?" said she, hesitating.

"Oh! I drove over in my gig; but the night is so boisterous that I shall not return unless you order a post-chaise, when I shall take advantage of its shelter to return to Abbotsbury, and send my servant to-morrow for my conveyance."

A fifteen miles drive with a young man at the dead of night, did not seem to Cora to come within the bounds of propriety.

She would have preferred returning, could she have done so, alone; but to go to a house containing two invalids, at a time so inconvenient, and when seemingly she was not expected, appeared undesirable, and not to be thought of; so she said that she should like a bed there.

The waiter sent the chambermaid, who conducted her to her room, which was the next to the sitting-room, opening into it through folding doors.

The silver old-fashioned urn threw out puffs of steam, as the lid danced up and down from the heat of the water.

The hot buttered toast and eggs looked inviting to Cora, who was both hungry and thirsty; and though she did not particularly like her companion, it was agreeable not to be quite alone amongst strangers. Thus, when she had washed and brushed her fair hair, and arranged her clean collar and cuffs, she came back in renovated beauty, and with a cheerful countenance.

If Rufus was not the rose, he had dwelt near it, as the Persian poet says. If he was not

Edmond, he was his brother, and could tell Cora about him.

She had the false shame—almost inseparable from youth, and not often surmounted in age—of not liking to admit her poverty. But she could not be blind to the profound respect paid by the people at the hotel to the son of Lord Helmingham; and she had an idea that on the following day she would ask to speak to the mistress, and request her to trust her for the amount of the bill, and borrow the money from Lady Helmingham to liquidate the debt.

She had not been at Abbotsbury long enough to have received any salary; but some small sum must be due, though she hated to ask for it from one who, like her patroness, not having felt the embarrassment of poverty, never seemed to think that people could want money.

“Shall I make the tea?” said Rufus; “you look tired.”

“Thank you! And now tell me all about everybody—your father?”

“He is recovering, and looking quite himself again. My stepmother has had an anxious time of it, but she is very cheerful now.”

"I am so glad!" said Cora, with a little spasm of jealousy that the cheerfulness had not been produced by her means.

"Yes; we have been much more lively lately. We have a new inmate, you know—or don't you know? Miss Lola Louis. She is one of the most beautiful girls I ever saw."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; Edmond seems as if he could never admire her sufficiently."

"O, happy fair!" said Cora, forcing a smile; "and is she agreeable?"

"Oh, charming! So sweet-tempered and obliging. My stepmother cannot bear to part with her for an instant."

"I suppose, as you are all so enchanted with her, she is likely to remain some time at Abbotsbury," suggested Cora, tentatively.

"I did not say that *I* was under her spell," replied Rufus; "but I think it needs no juror to foretell that Abbotsbury will be her future home. You see, my brother is now heir to a title and a fine property, and Miss Louis is a rich heiress, besides being personally so attractive; and Edmond being a sailor, and very easily

impressed—it would be extraordinary if he were not, as the lady's charms might warm an old stager of the London season, to say nothing of an honest Jack Tar, whose beau-ideal must have been formed from some seaport nymphs."

Cora certainly had not much enjoyment in her tea and hot buttered toast.

Rufus was deliberately stabbing her poor, anxious, miserable breast with his cold-blooded suggestions.

She could well understand the silence of Edmond now. She could tell why he wanted the verses back. They were to do duty a second time. Why should she go back to Abbotsbury, to be a witness to his devotion to Miss Louis ? She was "cursed in every granted prayer." She had desired to be in Edmond's presence, and now, on the eve of the accomplishment of her wish, she was longing to be away. But a change came over her mind : an intense curiosity to see the young beauty who had stolen from her his truant heart. Oh ! no ; she would not turn back if it were possible ; she would conceal every emotion of wounded affection and mortified pride,

and be cheerful, even if her heart should break in the effort.

Rufus had not finished tormenting his unfortunate victim.

Cora had to listen to the account which Rufus gave of Miss Louis' singing—how sweet and impassioned were those “syllables that breathed of the soft south.”

“I think I have paid her now, for preferring that ugly cub to myself,” he said, meditatively, when Cora, worn out, had bidden him good night, and retired to her room.

There she went on her knees to say her prayers, but no thought ascended to the throne of mercy ; thick sobs, convulsive and ever-recurring and drowning tears were her voiceless orisons. She arose at length, and washed her swollen eyelids, preparing for bed. She locked both the doors—one leading into the passage, and those folding ones which opened into the sitting-room.

Rufus heard the click of the lock, and smiled.

“She need not fear,” he said; “I want to sully her reputation, not her person.”

He waited for an hour, when he believed she was asleep,—for Cora, exhausted with a lengthened

journey and her agony of grief and jealousy, had, like a child, sobbed herself into slumber.

The folding doors were fastened by bolts running down into the floor and up into the woodwork above them. These bolts were on the sitting-room side.

Rufus stood on a chair and pulled down the bolt, and, descending, removed the one below, and pushing against the door the lock gave way.

He rang the bell, and when the sleepy waiter answered it, at length, Rufus was coming with a very guilty-seeming face from the bedroom.

The man gave a little start back, and then recovering himself, came forward to ask for orders.

“A glass of sherry and a biscuit. Nothing more. You may go to bed now. My room is,—let me see—No. 19?”

“Yes, sir. No. 19.”

Rufus, taking his candle, retired to No. 19; where putting on his Cashmere dressing-gown, and rolling himself in his rug and greatcoat, he slept tranquilly the remainder of the night on the sofa, leaving his bed undisturbed.

Before he settled himself to sleep he twisted round his finger a lock of long light hair, seemingly cut off close to the roots. He laughed a soft, low laugh as he did this.

“Cut with her own scissors, too! And behind the ear, from whence she will not miss it till the ends grow out and incommod[e] her!”

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